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ABSTRACT

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Newspaper

Local News Coverage Strategies in a Three-Way Daily Newspaper Competitive Market

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Local News Coverage Strategies in a Three-Way Daily Newspaper Competitive Market

ABSTRACT

An exploratory study examines local news coverage strategies in the first months of an unusual competitive market situation involving three daily newspapers. The market is a two-county area including four main medium-sized cities and a few dozen small towns. Content analysis was used to determine the amount and topics of local news coverage allocated to the various muncipalities in the market to find out if the papers were substitutes for each other.

Local News Coverage Strategies in a Three-Way Daily Newspaper Competitive Market

This research examines local news coverage of three competing daily newspapers in the first months of the three-way market. The purpose is to determine the strategies of the papers in defining local news, which in turn suggests how each defines/delineates the market. Are these papers substitutes for each other in their local coverage, or do readers have to take multiple subscriptions to get news coverage of the specific areas they want to know about?

The northwest corner of Arkansas offers a highly unusual competitive newspaper market situation. Since July 1998 three dailies — *The Morning News of Northwest Arkansas, The Northwest Arkansas Times,* and *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* — have been competing head-to-head-to-head for readers and advertisers in one of the healthiest economic areas of the country.[1]

The *Morning News of Northwest Arkansas* (MN) and the *Northwest Arkansas Times* (NAT) have maintained a fairly mild level of competition in this area for some years; however, in summer 1998 the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* (DG) of Little Rock entered the market with a daily zoned regional edition.[2]

The market itself is unusual. The typical competing newspaper market tends to be the large metropolitan area. This market, however, is comprised essentially of two counties — Washington and Benton — which include four small cities (the largest is about 56,000) and perhaps five dozen small towns (with populations from approximately 200 to 3,000). The total population of the two-county area is approximately 270,000.

Media observers in Northwest Arkansas describe the competition among the three papers as intense; some informally call it a "war."[3] Battles have been waged through slashed subscription prices and skirmishes around ad rates.[4] A major question, however, is what effect this competition has had on the news sections of the papers.

A major factor in research evaluating the effects of competition has been local news coverage. As an area of great interest to readers, local news is not only significant in competition, but also accessible to researchers.[5] Previous research on competitive newspaper markets suggests that there are some qualitative changes that occur, and that these changes tend to vary with the level of intensity of competition. Quality of content has been related to the financial commitment of the paper to the competition and the resulting levels of allocation of resources to the newsroom; for example, to fund increases in reporters and in salaries, and the addition of wire services. [6]

Local news coverage is particularly interesting in competitive markets because there is a certain *substitutability* of such papers.[7] Since each paper must meet a certain fundamental standard of coverage in any market, they all are likely to be highly similar — or substitutable — in local news coverage. Therefore, defining how a paper deals with coverage of local news becomes a challenge for editors and owners.

The competitive market in Northwest Arkansas presents a special problem for determining local news coverage. There are city governments, public schools and law enforcement agencies in the four main cities, as well as many of the several dozen small towns. In addition, there are two county governments which deal with issues that span city limits. Substitutability becomes an interesting matter when the market presents so many possible configurations for the definition of local news.

Literature Review

The relationship between competition and coverage was first formalized in a "financial commitment theory" by Litman and Bridges (1986) in which they described newspaper performance as the *financial commitment* of newspapers to providing their editorial product. Lacy (1992) further elaborated on the theory in developing a Conceptual Model of Financial Commitment. The bottom line, according to Lacy, was that intense competition does have some effect on news media content, and that effect is basically positive from the audience's perspective.

Wanta and Johnson (1994) added another consideration: they found support for the "sociology of news" theory which suggests that news content will not necessarily vary for papers in competitive markets. Because of developing standards for journalistic performance and increasing professionalism in the field, news tends to be homogenized, no matter what the market structure.

However, Lacy, Coulson and St. Cyr (1998) questioned reporters on city hall beats across the country and produced evidence which supported the relationship of competition to news content. They found that beat reporters, in responding to a survey, perceived that competition did "have some impact on their behavior and their content." Competition had both negative and positive effects. While reporters had less time to develop in-depth stories, for example, more stories were covered, including some which might have been missed in a less competitive situation.

Reporters are thus likely responding to the dual needs to get at least the same story as the competition, and then to get something more. Lacy (1989), Bigman (1948) and Schweitzer and Goldman (1975) suggested that similarity in content is linked to competition among newspapers. Moreover, "Intense competition is associated with a high degree of substitutability." (Lacy 1989)

In the analyses of competing newspaper markets, local news has long been considered a significant factor. Bigman (1948) in his study of the decline in competing newspaper markets as a threat to free expression, considered local news by comparing coverage of labor issues in Pottsville, Pa. He also noted that analyses of the papers and their content "reveal strong similarity," concluding that more papers do not necessarily mean divergent voices. Over the past 50 years, studies of competitive newspapers have frequently included local news coverage as a basis for comparison. Rarick and Hartman (1966) considered space devoted to local content; Grotta (1971) looked at local newsholes; Schweitzer and Goldman (1975) found that local content does not necessarily decline with decreased competition; Lacy (1989) in a model of news demand related competition to coverage; and Wanta and Johnson (1994) looked at content changes including local news in varying levels of competition.

Research has described a variety of structures or models of several levels of competing newspaper markets (Rosse 1975; Owen 1975; Lacy 1992). Accordingly, the Northwest Arkansas market could be defined as a variant of an "intercity newspaper competition." The four layers which make up this model would consist of the DG as the metropolitan daily which publishes "large amount of regional and national news"; the NAT and the MN as the satellite-city dailies which are more local but still carry some non-local news; a few small-circulation dailies and weeklies in the two counties which are almost entirely local; and a collection of shoppers and non-specialized non-daily newspapers. Only the two top layers are major competitors.[8]

Background

The Market. Northwest Arkansas is a distinct area of the state — topographically, economically and culturally. It is the home of the major university in the state higher education system and also to the headquarters of three Fortune 500 firms — Wal-Mart, Tyson Foods and J.B. Hunt trucking company. Since 1990 there has been an influx of new residents, from upscale retirees into the more northern part of the area to Mexican immigrants seeking good jobs in food processing.[9]

All or parts of eight counties comprise the Northwest Arkansas region; however, the three papers in this study tend to concentrate their coverage on Washington and Benton counties [The other six, Madison, Carroll, Crawford, Franklin, Johnson and Newton, have sparse populations.] The populations of these two principle counties are about the same and total approximately 270,000 (Washington, 138,454; Benton, 134,162). The four main cities, however, differ significantly in populations with Fayetteville the largest at nearly 53,000. Springdale and Rogers are close at almost 38,000 and 35,000, respectively. Bentonville is fourth with about 15,000. With the exception of Bella Vista, at 13,000, the small towns in the two counties have populations between 300 and 2,700. The average household income in the two counties is very similar — $32,375 in Washington County, and $34,807 in Benton County.[10]

Table 1 gives the breakdown of population in the towns and cities of the two-county coverage area, and the per capita income for the four main cities of Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers and Bentonville. Although the area includes a few residents who are extremely wealthy (e.g., the family of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton), poverty is widespread.[11] The per capita income in each of the four cities in also very similar.In terms of location, Fayetteville, Springdale and Rogers are on a North-South line, with Fayetteville at the southern end, just below the approximate geographic center of the two-county area. Its town center is about nine miles from Springdale's town center. Rogers is then another 10 miles or so north of Springdale. Bentonville is six or seven miles west and slightly north of Rogers. Bentonville and Rogers are the most northern of the four; Bentonville, in fact, is about 12 miles south of the Missouri border.

Economic growth in the area over the last 10 to 15 years has been dramatic. One measure of this growth is the total value of annual building permits, which ballooned at a 101 percent increase between 1984 and 1991. Also hotel/motel/restaurant tax receipts grew by about 73 percent between 1991 and 1998. Fayetteville, the largest city, has grown 33 percent in population since the official 1990 census and the current estimate of 56,056, and is expected to grow another 15 percent in the next four years. [12]

These figures suggest increases in advertising dollars, which make the area such a lucrative market for a dominant daily newspaper.[13]

The Papers. None of the three papers is locally owned. The DG is owned by Walter Hussman, Jr., of Little Rock, who, through WEHCO Media Incorporated, also owns other media outlets in Arkansas and has recently expanded to Tennessee. The northwest regional edition is published out of offices and printing facilities in the Northwest Arkansas area.

The MN, published in Springdale, is owned by Donrey Media Group, with corporate headquarters in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Donrey operates 26 newspapers in nine states, including three others in Arkansas. In turn, Donrey is owned by Jackson T. Stephens through The Stephens Group of Little Rock; Stephens is also chairman of Stephens Incorporated, a diversified financial group which is a major underwriter of municipal bonds and corporate equity offerings. It ranks among the 20 largest investment banking firms in the United States.

The NAT, located in Fayetteville, is the property of American Publishing Company of Chicago, which is the U.S. subsidiary of Hollinger International Incorporated, the world's third largest newspaper publisher in terms of circulation (behind News Corporation and Gannett).[14] The paper was owned previously for 55 years by the Fulbright family of Fayetteville; J. William Fulbright of that family was a former U.S. Senator from Arkansas and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.[15]

No official circulation figures are available as of this writing which would relate to any changes which might have occurred since the DG started up the regional edition in July 1998. Audit Bureau of Circulation figures which are available can tell a partial story. **Table 2** gives Washington and Benton county penetration report circulation figures for March 10, 1998, which indicate the MN was a clear leader. **Table 3** gives additional information based on a September 1998 ABC report for the MN and the NAT; these are total circulation figures, not broken down by county. **Table 4** gives figures from an ABC "snapshot" of circulation in Benton and Washington counties; this is a picture of circulation on one particular unspecified day during the 12-month period between September 30, 1997 and 1998. Since the "snapshot" date is not revealed by ABC, one can't know whether or not the figures reflect any change since mid-summer 1998.

In addition, the DG has its own figures which state that the Northwest Arkansas edition at the end of November 1998 had a daily circulation of 19,459, an increase of 21.5 percent over its circulation in the region before the zoned edition was launched.[16]

It can be seen from the official figures, however, that the MN maintains the lead. The "snapshot" shows that paper with a total daily circulation in Benton and Washington counties of just under 33,000; while the NAT had a daily circulation of about 14,000. On that same day the DG had a daily circulation of about 8,000 in the two-county area. As of this writing, no official figures have been released which would reflect any circulation changes since the DG zoned regional edition.

Research Questions

The primary question is, how do these three daily newspapers in this competitive market situation define and assign their local coverage? Specifically:

Research Question 1: How do the papers compare in their overall amount of coverage of "local news"?

Research Question 2: How do these newspapers define the coverage area geographically? Where do they concentrate their coverage in Northwest Arkansas?

a. For each paper, how is coverage allocated between the two counties? What cities and towns are covered by each paper?

b. For each paper, how is coverage allocated among the cities and towns of the counties?

c. Are the papers similar or different in their allocation of coverage geographically?

Research Question 3: How do these newspapers define coverage by topics?

a. What topic areas are emphasized in their coverage?

b. How is this coverage broken down by counties, cities and small towns?

Methodology

In order to answer these questions, a content analysis was performed on a sample of the three newspapers from the first five months after the DG's regional edition entry into the market; that is, August through December 1998. A constructed week of seven randomly selected days was determined for each of the five months, and issues of the three papers from those days were collected and examined.

The content analysis was focused strictly on local coverage, which was defined as issues of critical interest to one city or municipality; that is, city government, public schools, law enforcement agencies. In this case "local news" could refer to such issues in any one of the few dozen towns in the coverage area. It could also refer to issues in county governments which transcend city limits and to regional issues. Local news included those stories found in the "A" section of the MN and the NAT, and the "Northwest Arkansas" zoned section of the DG. News stories only were included; not counted were obits, editorials, comics, sports or syndicated features such as the horoscope or advice columns.

The content analysis identified all stories by dateline and by topic. The length of each story was measured in column inches, which were converted to a percentage reflecting the portion of the total amount of space in that issue devoted to local news. Varying column widths were converted to a standard. Percentages were also used to show how often stories about cities and towns appeared; that is, the relative frequency of their coverage.

The various stories covered by the three papers in the five-month sample were grouped into eight topic categories:

- Law Enforcement — police reports, automobile accidents, crime reports and the court system;
- City Government — city council, planning commission and other municipal governmental agencies;
- Local Interest Features — annual festivals, crafts fairs, personal profiles;
- Higher Education — the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, and Northwest Arkansas Community College in Rogers;
- Public Schools — school boards and officials, news about school activities, opening day;
- County Government — Quorum Court;
- Region — weather, water issues, new regional airport;
- Election — city and county elections.

These categories were developed for this study. They emerged from an analysis of the most frequently appearing topics in the local news pages of the three newspapers, and to a large extent reflect typical newspaper "beats."

Results

Research Question 1. Overall comparison of local news coverage by each paper.

Table 5 shows that the MN ran by far the most stories in local news coverage — 490 total stories to 408 by the NAT and 308 by the DG. However, the NAT allocated the most space in column inches on a daily average to local news — roughly 217 column inches. Not far behind was the MN with 191 column inches. Both led the DG however, which ran an average of 149 column inches of local news coverage per issue in this sample. The NAT also tended to run longer stories on average, in fact, more than twice as long as the average MN or DG story, which were about the same at six to seven column inches. Research Question 2. Geographic coverage.

This study considered how coverage was allocated between the two primary counties, Washington and Benton; among the four main cities, and among the small towns in the two counties [Refer to **Table 1.**] About the same number of small towns in both counties tend to receive some attention from the papers; that is, there are 12 towns in Washington County that received some coverage, and 14 in Benton County. The MN covered 10 towns out of the 14 in Benton County, but seven out of 12 in Washington County. The DG included coverage of 13 out of the 14 Benton County towns, but six out of the 12 Washington County towns. The NAT, however, covered six out of 12 towns in Benton County, and 75 percent, or nine out of 12, of the Washington County towns.

As shown in **Table 6**, the MN focused more than 10 percent of its total coverage on towns in Benton County, and the DG gave these towns in that county nine percent. The DG, however, gave 4.5 percent of its coverage to towns in Washington County, whereas the MN gave those towns 2.6 percent. In this sample, the MN ran 51 stories about towns in Benton County to 13 on Washington County towns; the DG, though, ran 28 stories about Benton towns and 14 about Washington County towns.

The NAT's county coverage was almost the opposite. Washington County towns received 6.4 percent of the stories, while Benton County towns got about 3 percent. In hard numbers, that is 26 stories about towns in Washington County and 12 about Benton County.

Table 7 indicates there was quite some variation in the allocation of coverage by the newspapers of each of the four main cities — Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers and Bentonville. The MN (published in Springdale) gives roughly equal coverage to Fayetteville, Springdale and Rogers in terms of both total number of stories and percentage of total stories. On average, Fayetteville receives somewhat more space (21.4 percent of space per issue, compared to 18 percent for Springdale and 15 percent for Rogers); thus, Fayetteville stories tend to be longer. The DG and the NAT both give Fayetteville the heaviest coverage by far. The DG allocates 37 percent of its stories to Fayetteville, which appear in 97 percent of the issues in this sample. The NAT — which is published in Fayetteville — gives that city 42.6 percent of its stories, which appear in 91 percent of the issues in this sample.

Bentonville receives the least amount of coverage from the MN, but is second in coverage by the DG, which covered Bentonville and Springdale in about the same amounts — that is, total stories and percentages of stories — with the edge going to Bentonville. The DG gave the least coverage to Rogers, with less than six percent of its stories. Rogers also got the least amount of coverage by the NAT, only six stories out of the five-month sample of 408 (2.3 percent).

Research Question 3. Coverage of Topics.

As noted in the Methodology section, all stories were grouped in categories of eight topics: law enforcement, city government, local interest features, higher education, regional issues, county governments, public schools and elections. These are for the most part typical "beat" areas on newspapers.

As seen in **Table 8**, the MN concentrated on Benton County, covering in particular law enforcement and city governments. In Washington County that paper tended to cover mainly city governments. The MN gave the smaller town public schools little coverage in either county, though Benton County schools did get somewhat more attention. In all, both the MN and the DG gave public schools more coverage than did the NAT.

The DG's heaviest small town coverage centered on city governments in Benton County; in fact, these stories accounted for more than half of the DG's Benton County coverage. About 10 to 14 percent of county small town stories were given each to law enforcement, features, regional issues and public schools. In Washington County, the DG concentrated coverage on law enforcement, city government and local interest features; each topic received 28.6 percent of the DG's Washington County stories.

The NAT coverage in county towns differed from that of the MN and the DG. It covered mainly law enforcement issues; then city governments and features. Washington County received the heaviest coverage by the NAT; 38.5 percent of stories were on law enforcement and 31 percent on features. City governments were given about one-third that level of coverage, or 11 percent of Washington County stories. In Benton County, the NAT focused on law enforcement (about 33 percent of its total Benton

County stories) and city governments (about 42 percent of its Benton County stories). In hard figures, though, this amounted to four and five stories respectively over the five-month sample.

The papers might be considered separately concerning their coverage of the eight topic areas in the four main cities; comparisons of their coverage these topics are seen in **Tables 9.1, 9.2, 9.3.** The MN, for example, gave heaviest coverage to city governments in all four cities, with the greatest amount of coverage given to Springdale city government. It gave Fayetteville almost the same amount of coverage in law enforcement issues and on higher education as it did city government. The MN gave heavy coverage in Rogers to law enforcement — 53 percent of the total MN stories on Rogers (42 out of 79) and 8.6 percent of the overall MN total stories. This is compared to Fayetteville law enforcement coverage of 4.3 percent of total stories, and Springdale law enforcement coverage of 3.5 percent total stories, and to 4.5 percent of total stories about Rogers city government. Regarding public school s, the MN covered Rogers the most with six stories, Springdale with four and Bentonville with three; no public school stories about Fayetteville appeared in the MN in this sample. Of the three papers, however, the MN gave the most coverage overall to public schools.

The DG concentrated on Fayetteville and Bentonville. See **Table 9.2.** Both cities received strong attention to law enforcement issues (with both cities each receiving about eight percent of total stories), but Fayetteville city government was covered heaviest with 49 stories (or 16 percent of total DG stories). The DG covered Fayetteville in all eight topic areas — the only instance of one of the papers giving such across-the-board coverage. The paper gave very little attention at all to Rogers. Instead the DG paid attention to Bentonville, covering law enforcement the most (refer to above); about half that level of coverage was given to Bentonville city government. The DG covered Fayetteville public schools at about the same level as the NAT did, but gave much less coverage to Bentonville and Springdale school systems.

The NAT gave heaviest coverage to Fayetteville law enforcement issues — 58 stories, or 14.2 percent of the NAT total stories. See **Table 9.3.** But it also heavily covered Fayetteville city government, local interest features and higher education issues (note that Fayetteville is home to the University of

Arkansas). Less than half of the coverage went to the other topic areas. The NAT also gave attention to Springdale, mostly on law enforcement issues and less on city government. There was very little coverage of any topics at all in either Rogers or Bentonville. Overall the NAT emphasized coverage of law enforcement issues (a total of 83 stories in both Fayetteville and Springdale, which is about 20 percent of total NAT stories). A total of 57 stories (or 14 percent of all stories) focused on Fayetteville and Springdale city governments.

Discussion

The DG's entrance into the Northwest Arkansas daily newspaper market with a regional zoned edition in summer 1998 created a very unusual competitive situation — three dailies serving the same area which consists principally of two counties with several dozen small towns and four larger communities. A market — or readership — which varies so much in number and size of municipalities might be termed an "intercity newspaper competition"; in such a market, newspapers tend to position themselves to serve different purposes, depending on their size. However, in this market, all three papers have an interest in competing directly against each other for parts of the same market, and thus having similar definitions of local news coverage.

Competitive newspapers have been shown in past research to be substitutes for each other to some extent while making efforts to be different and distinct from the competition. The primary purpose of this research was to determine the strategies of these three papers for defining the local news coverage market for themselves. Can they be regarded as substitutes for one another — in terms of the quantity of local news coverage?

The results show that the three papers compete among each other in local news coverage in varying ways; that is, the DG seems to compete directly with the MN in some respects, but not in others. In still others, it competes directly with the NAT. Therefore, the DG could be substituted for the MN for the segment of the readership which is interested in certain cities and towns and topics, but those readers would also have to subscribe to the NAT for information on other cities, towns and topics. Since this study makes no attempt whatsoever to evaluate the quality of the content of the three papers, all the distinctions made in coverage here are based solely on amount of coverage; that is, where specifically coverage is given and approximately how much.

An example of this "segmenting" of local news can be seen in the coverage of the small towns in the two counties. If Fayetteville and Springdale are taken together as a sort of center of the market area, the DG and the MN tend to start there and go north into Benton County for the bulk of their coverage. The NAT firmly centers its coverage on Fayetteville, but then leans more to the south into Washington County.

It might be assumed that in the county towns, the amount of coverage would be directly correlated to population size (and, thus, perhaps circulation size). This assumption was correct in a very limited way. For example, the largest towns in Benton County — Bella Vista and Siloam Springs — did receive the heaviest coverage by the MN. But the MN coverage of other Benton County towns was not predictable by population at all. The DG also gave Bella Vista the most coverage of the Benton County towns, but was on the whole unpredictable as well by population. There were no apparent correlations among the three papers in the amount of coverage given the towns. When the NAT covered Benton County, it gave most of the attention to a very small town which provided the dateline because it was simply the site nearest the new regional airport — which was a news issue during this five-month period. In Washington County as well, coverage of the towns among the three papers varied in ways that did not fit any predictable pattern, such as population.

As noted above, the NAT concentrated its coverage on Fayetteville, its hometown location; for the NAT local news coverage extended up the road to Springdale but not much further north. In Washington County small towns, the NAT's local coverage was most often on law enforcement issues, then local interest features. Although the NAT paid more attention to the smaller Washington County towns overall, the MN targeted its coverage on the towns' municipal governments and ran more than double the number of stories than the NAT.

In the four larger cities, the coverage see-sawed back and forth. For example, the DG went directly head-to-head with the NAT in Fayetteville, weighing in with particular emphasis on city government , while the NAT gave heavier coverage to law enforcement issues in the city. The DG didn't spend much time or ink covering Springdale and Rogers. Instead it gave more attention to Bentonville where it focused on two main topics — city government and law enforcement. The MN also gave some coverage to Bentonville, but primarily to city government; very little else in that city was covered. The NAT gave Bentonville very little coverage.

The NAT and the MN were in most direct competition in coverage of local issues in Springdale, but they focused their subject matter differently. The MN produced about 20 percent more stories about Springdale than the NAT, and more than half of those stories were about Springdale city affairs. Readers could find some information about Springdale city government in the NAT, but they would learn more about that city's law enforcement and even public schools than they would in the MN.

Readers in Rogers could subscribe to one paper and learn what they needed to know about their hometown, as the MN was the only paper of the three to really cover Rogers, which it did to roughly the same extent it covered Springdale. The MN covered Rogers law enforcement , city government and public schools — but especially law enforcement which generated a large proportion of the stories.

So, all in all, readers in Northwest Arkansas might make their newspaper subscription choices as below:

- Washington County small towns: the NAT.
- Benton County small towns: the MN.
- Fayetteville: The choice depends on the news the reader wants. Fayetteville represents the nuclear core of the Northwest Arkansas coverage for the three papers. Take the DG for the most stories on city government; the NAT for law enforcement and public schools coverage; the MN for a balanced (in terms of numbers of stories) coverage of most topics.
- Springdale: The MN covers city government, but the NAT covers law enforcement and has a little more information on public schools.

Three-Way Daily Newspaper———

- Rogers: The MN is the only choice.
- Bentonville: Although the MN gives some coverage, the DG is the pick for covering law enforcement and city government.

Conclusion

These three newspapers might be substitutes for each other in their coverage of Fayetteville, but once they leave the city limits, they vary in their approaches to covering Northwest Arkansas, and trying to explain why is a challenge. The NAT concentrates on Fayetteville obviously because that city is its hometown base and has been for the history of the paper. In fact, the NAT is often referred to as "the Fayetteville paper."

The MN operates out of Springdale, and until a few years ago, published an edition out of Rogers; therefore it continues its focus on those two cities. "The Springdale paper," as it is has been known, has always given some coverage to Fayetteville, but has stepped up that coverage in recent years, and operates a news bureau there as well. Its coverage of Bentonville comes to some extent from a story exchange arrangement with the *Benton County Daily Record,* the daily newspaper in Bentonville.

The DG's zoned regional edition is the ingredient which may change the mix of coverage. It has entered the market by focusing heavily on Fayetteville affairs and, to a lesser extent, Bentonville. So far, Springdale and Rogers get far less attention.

The balance of coverage among the three papers does not correlate to income levels in counties, or essentially to population figures. Instead it is more likely related to factors which were not considerations in this study, such as locations of major advertisers and shopping areas, the sections of the region which attract the most spending. A second factor might the sections of the region which are expected to grow the most and the fastest in coming years. And a third might involve the cost of different types of coverage; for example, law enforcement issues (police, automobile collisions, crime reports) might be less expensive to cover because a reporter, by relying on official sources, can get more stories done in a certain time frame — as opposed to committing a reporter to covering city government (city council meetings, planning commission) and its lengthy meetings which require the reporter's attendance. Noting that the NAT seemed to emphasize law enforcement coverage more than the MN or the DG, suggests that perhaps its resources may be than the others.

This was an exploratory study; there are many more aspects of this competitive market which bear investigation. For example, one interesting area of research could focus on comparisons of high school sports coverage; in a region of many small towns and public school systems, popular sports such as football, basketball and baseball are essentially local news and are read avidly by parents and fans. Other content studies might deal with kinds and amounts of display advertising, especially the major accounts; the use of local photography on page one and the section fronts; the inclusion of state, national and international news as opposed to local news; and maybe even qualitative concerns such as accuracy and depth of stories.

Trying to draw a picture of a newspaper's coverage of an area requires a much more subtle touch than can be managed through a basic content analysis; however, this research is the place to start.

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[1] *The Benton County Daily Record* is published in Bentonville. It is not included in this study because its primary circulation area is essentially different from the main focus of the three competing daily newspapers; the most intense competition is in the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers corridor. Two of the three, *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* and *The Morning News,* do circulate to some extent in Bentonville. Audit Bureau of Circulations 1998 circulation figures for the *Benton County Daily Record* were 10,582, as published in the article "Start the Presses," in the December 13, 1998, edition of *Northwest Arkansas Business Matters*, a regular publication of *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* (page 15).

[2] *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* had been circulated in Northwest Arkansas for years before the zoned edition, which was inaugurated July 13, but it was not a major competitor in the market.

[3] William Bowden, "Northwest Arkansas Newspapers at War," unpublished master's thesis. University of Arkansas, fall 1998: p. 2.

[4] Miguel Casas, "Start the Presses," *Northwest Arkansas Business Matters* (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Sunday, December 13, 1998): p. 17.

[5] Local news has been considered a variable in the study of competing newspaper markets for many years. See for example, Stanley K. Bigman, "Rivals in Conformity: A Study of Two Competing Dailies," *Journalism Quarterly* 25 (1948): p. 127-131; Galen Rarick and Barrie Hartman, "The Effects of Competition on One Daily Newspaper's Content," *Journalism Quarterly* 43 (Autumn 1966): p. 459-463; Gerald Grotta, "Consolidation of Newspapers: What Happens to the Consumer?" *Journalism Quarterly* 48 (Summer 1971): p 245-250; John C. Schweitzer and Elaine Goldman, "Does Newspaper Competition Make a Difference to Readers?" *Journalism Quarterly* 52 (Winter 1975): p. 706-710; Stephen Lacy, "A Model of Demand for News: Impact Of Competition on Newspaper Content," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (Spring 1989): p 40-48 and 128; Wayne Wanta and Thomas J. Johnson, "Content Changes in the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* During Different Market Situations," *The Journal of Media Economics* 7 (1), 1994: p 13-28.

[6] Barry R. Litman and Janet Bridges, "An Economic Analysis of Daily Newspaper Performance," *Newspaper Research Journal* 7(3), 1986; p. 9-26.

[7] Bigman, "Rivals in Conformity," p. 130-131; Lacy, "Model of Demand for News," p. 44; Lacy, "Financial Commitment Approach," p. 8.

[8] Lacy "Financial Commitment Approach," p. 11.

[9] Dori Perrucci, "Gloves Come Off in 4-Way Fight," *Mediaweek* (July 27, 1998): p. 12-13; Scott A Johnson, "Area's immigrant populations deal with dislocaiton differently," *The Northwest Arkansas Times* (Sunday, March 28, 1999): p. M1 and M8.

[10] County Population Estimates for July 1, 1998 and Population Changes, July 1, 1997 to July 1, 1998, from "Population Estimates Program," Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census. Internet Release Date: March 12, 1999. (http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/co-98-1/98C1_05.txt). Also, "Model-Based Income and Poverty Estimates for Washington County, Arkansas in

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[11] 1990 Census Information.

[12] Judith Boudreaux, "Expert: Area's growth to remain steady, strong," *Northwest Arkansas Times* (Sunday, January 31, 1999): p. C6.

[13] Casas, "Start the Presses," p. 16.

[14] Ibid., p. 17. In December 1998, Hollinger sold 45 of its newspapers including three in other Arkansas counties.

[15] Bowden, "Newspapers at War," p. 6-8.

[16] Casas, "Start the Presses," p. 17.

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Table 1

Municipalities within the two-county area: population and per capita income

Population figures are from "Estimates of the Population of States, Counties, Places, and Minor Civil Divisions: Annual Time Series, July 1, 1991 to July 1, 1996," Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census (Internet Release Date: November 18, 1997). The figures given here are from July 1, 1996.

Municipality	Population		
Four main cities			
Fayetteville	52,360		
Springdale	38,572		
Rogers	35,355		
Bentonville	16,984		
Towns by County			
Washington Co.		Benton Co.	
Elkins	934	Bella Vista*	12,000
Elm Springs	981	Cave Springs	1,067
Farmington	2,156	Centerton	1,200
Goshen	705	Decatur	1,206
Greenland	899	Garfield	345
Johnson	1,508	Gentry	1,953
Lincoln	1,545	Gravette	1,844
Prairie Grove	2,120	Lowell	3,652
Tontitown	458	Pea Ridge	2,021
West Fork	1,919	Siloam Springs	10,055
Winslow	213	Sulphur Springs	580

*The source for this figure is the Bentonville/Bella Vista Chamber of Commerce web site (http://nwanews.com/bbvchamber/). Bella Vista is unincorporated.

Table 2

Penetration Report Daily Circulation Figures for March 10, 1998
Washington and Benton Counties, Combined

Newspaper	Circulation
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Northwest Arkansas edition)	7,987
The Morning News of Northwest Arkansas	32,738
Northwest Arkansas Times	13,926

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations County Penetration Report, March 10, 1998

Table 3

Total Circulation: *The Morning News* and *The Northwest Arkansas Times*
Most recent two circulation audits

Newspaper (daily circulation)	1998	1997	1996
The Morning News of Northwest Arkansas	33,524	34,153	
[Total average paid circulation for 12 months ended September 30, 1998; paper is audited every year.]			
Northwest Arkansas Times	13,391		14,368
[Total average paid circulation for 24 months ended September 30, 1998; paper is audited every other year.]			

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations Newspaper Audit Report; released January 1999

Table 4

County Daily Circulation Penetration Report Random "Snapshot" Sample from Unnamed Date between September 30, 1997 and September 30, 1998

	"Snapshot" Circulation		
Newspaper	Benton Co	Washington Co	Total
The Morning News of Northwest Arkansas	16, 404	16,334	32,738
Northwest Arkansas Times	609	13,316	13,925
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette	3,405	4,724	8,129

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations County Penetration Report; October 5, 1998

Table 5

Local News Coverage from 5-Month Sample Total Stories; Average Space per Issue; Average Story Length

Newspaper	Total Stories	Local Coverage Average Space Per Issue	Average Story Length
The Morning News of Northwest Arkansas	490	191.34 col. in.	7.3 col. in.
Northwest Arkansas Times	408	217.46 col. in.	18.65 col. in.
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette	308	147.04 col. in.	6.0 col. in.

Table 6

Comparison of Papers' Coverage of Towns in Both Counties

	Benton Co		Washington Co	
Newspaper	Total Stories on County	% of Total stories in sample	Total Stories on county	% of Total stories in sample
The Morning News of Northwest Arkansas	51	10.4 %	13	2.6 %
Northwest Arkansas Times	12	2.9 %	26	6.4 %
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette	28	9.0 %	14	4.5 %

Table 7

Comparison of Papers' Coverage of 4 Cities

Newspapers	MN (490 total stories)				DG (308 total stories)				NAT (408 total stories)			
Cities	Stories about city	% of total stories	% of issues	% space per issue	Stories about city	% of total stories	% of issues	% space per issue	Stories about city	% of total stories	% of issues	% space per issue
Fayetteville	82	16.7	83	21.4	115	37.3	97	40	174	42.6	91.4	45
Springdale	77	15.7	83	18	30	9.7	57	19.6	62	24	74.3	19.4
Rogers	78	16	86	15	18	5.8	40	12.4	6	2.3	14.3	6.4
Bentonville	29	6	60	10.4	42	13.6	60	21.2	17	4.17	40	6.4

Table 8

Comparison of Papers' Coverage of Local News Topics in Counties

Newspapers	MN (490 total stories)				DG (308 total stories)				NAT (408 total stories)			
	Benton Co. 51 stories about county		Washington Co. 13 stories about county		Benton Co. 28 stories about county		Washington Co. 14 stories about county		Benton Co. 12 stories about county		Washington Co. 26 stories about county	
Story Topics	Total Stories*	% of stories**	Total Stories*	% of stories**	Total Stories*	% of stories**	Total Stories*	% of stories**	Total Stories*	% of stories**	Total Stories*	% of stories**
Law Enforcement	19	37 %	0	0	3	10.7 %	4	28.6 %	4	33.3 %	10	38.5%
City Government	20	39 %	8	61.5 %	14	50 %	4	28.6 %	5	41.7 %	3	11.5 %
Local Interest Features	4	7.8 %	2	15.4 %	3	10.7 %	4	28.6 %	0	0	8	30.8 %
Higher Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regional Issues	1	2 %	0	0	4	14.3 %	0	0	2	16.7 %	0	0
County Government	1	2 %	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public Schools	6	11.8 %	3	23 %	4	14.3 %	2	14.3 %	1	8.3 %	2	7.7 %
Election	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	11.5 %
	Total: 10 % of stories in MN		Total: 2.6 % of stories in MN		Total: 9 % of stories in DG		Total: 4.5 % of stories in DG		Total: 2.9 % of stories in NAT		Total: 6.4 % of stories in NAT	

* Number of stories per topic per county.
**Percent of stories per topic per county.

Table 9.1
Comparison of Newspapers' Coverage of Topics in 4 Cities

Morning News	Law Enforcement	City Gov.	Local Interest Features	Higher Ed.	Regional	Co. Gov.	Public Schools	Election
Fayetteville	21 local stories 4.3 % of all stories	22 local stories 4.5 % of all stories	6 local stories 1.2 % of all stories	25 local stories 5.1 % of all stories	6 local stories 1.2 % of all stories	0 0	0 0	3 local stories .6 % of all stories
Springdale	17 local stories 3.5 % of all stories	42 local stories 8.6 % of all stories	10 local stories 2 % of all stories	0 0	2 local stories .4 % of all stories	0 0	4 local stories .8 % of all stories	3 local stories .6 % of all stories
Rogers	42 local stories 8.6 % of all stories	22 local stories 4.5 % of all stories	2 local stories .4 % of all stories	4 local stories .82 % of all stories	1 local story .2 % of all stories	0 0	6 local stories 1.2 % of all stories	2 local stories .4 % of all stories
Bentonville	5 local stories 1 % of all stories	15 local stories 3 % of all stories	5 local stories 1 % of all stories	0 0	0 0	1 local story .2 % of all stories	3 local stories .6 % of all stories	0 0
Total stories	85	101	23	29	9	1	13	8

Table 9.2
Comparison of Newspapers' Coverage of Topics in 4 Cities

Arkansas Democrat Gazette	Law Enforcement	City Gov.	Local Interest Features	Higher Ed.	Regional	Co. Gov.	Public Schools	Election
Fayetteville	24 local stories 7.8 % of all stories	49 local stories 16 % of all stories	9 local stories 3 % of all stories	20 local stories 6.5 % of all stories	2 local stories .65 % of all stories	4 local stories 1.3 % of all stories	5 local stories 1.6 % of all stories	2 local stories .65 % of all stories
Springdale	6 local stories 2.0 % of all stories	14 local stories 4.5 % of all stories	8 local stories 2.6 % of all stories	0 0	1 local story .32 % of all stories	0 0	1 local story .32 % of all stories	0 0
Rogers	7 local stories 2.3 % of all stories	8 local stories 2.6 % of all stories	1 local stories .32 % of all stories	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 local stories .65 % of all stories
Bentonville	25 local stories 8.1 % of all stories	13 local stories 4.2 % of all stories	1 local story .32 % of all stories	1 local story .32 % of all stories	0 0	1 local story .32 % of all stories	2 local stories .65 % of all stories	0 0
Total stories	62	84	19	21	3	5	8	4

Table 9.3
Comparison of Newspapers' Coverage of Topics in 4 Cities

Northwest Arkansas Times	Law Enforcement	City Gov.	Local Interest Features	Higher Ed.	Regional	Co. Gov.	Public Schools	Election
Fayetteville	58 local stories 14.2 % of all stories	39 local stories 9.6 % of all stories	21 local stories 5.1 % of all stories	33 local stories 8 % of all stories	11 local stories 2.7 % of all stories	0 0	10 local stories 2.5 % of all stories	6 local stories 1.5 % of all stories
Springdale	25 local stories 6.1 % of all stories	18 local stories 4.4 % of all stories	7 local stories 1.7 % of all stories	1 local story .25 % of all stories	1 local story .25 % of all stories	0 0	7 local stories 1.7 % of all stories	3 local stories .7 % of all stories
Rogers	2 local stories .5 % of all stories	1 local story .25 % of all stories	3 local stories .7 % of all stories	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Bentonville	6 local stories 1.5 % of all stories	3 local stories .73 % of all stories	3 local stories .7 % of all stories	2 local stories .5 % of all stories	2 local stories .5 % of all stories	0 0	1 local story .25 % of all stories	0 0
Total stories	91	61	34	36	14	0	18	9

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Enterprise and Investigative Reporting at Ohio Metropolitan Newspapers in 1980 and in 1995

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Underwood and McManus argue maximizing profit is incompatible with covering an establishment that includes media executives and celebrity reporters. Hamill thinks a cozy relationship between corporate ownership and market-oriented newsrooms endangers investigative reporting. Demers argues the managerial revolution has improved newspapers. rather than eroding their quality. Authors' earlier study found a decline in investigative and rise in feature reporting in three major dailies from 1980 to 1995. This content analysis of six Ohio dailies found less shift from investigative reporting, noting some smaller papers expanded both forms.

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Enterprise and Investigative Reporting at Ohio Metropolitan Newspapers in 1980 and in 1995

Introduction

As the twentieth century closes, with media concentration and conglomeration generating increasing attention to revenue streams and returns on stockholder equity, defining news has become more complex than it once was. Doug Underwood, James Squires, John McManus, and others have written at length of the corporatization of American media in the last two decades and the consequences for news coverage of closer linkages between newsrooms and corporate objectives.[1] Simply stated, the corporate goals of maximizing profits and maintaining the status quo or managing change may be incompatible with either the traditional watchdog or guard-dog missions of journalism to monitor the establishment, an establishment that now frequently includes media owners as well as news executives and celebrity reporters. Numerous media critics and news professionals have questioned whether this cozy relationship spells the end of investigative reporting, a form of journalism once held in the highest regard in newsrooms. Pete Hamill, until recently editor-in-chief at *the New York Daily News,* has offered one of the most pointed of indictments, writing: "Complicated investigative pieces also begin to fade off the schedules. They take too long to produce, are too expensive, and hey, do the readers really care? Television doesn't do this stuff anymore, so why should we? Editors sigh and cobble together replacements. Local features can be inflated by graphic designers to give the illusion of depth."[2]

Modern investigative reporting achieved a considerable cachet with journalists, as well as capturing reader interest, with the advent in the early 1970s of what is now referenced simply as Watergate. During the Watergate period, a series of relentless investigative stories, at first developed solely by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* and later by Washington reporters for other major newspapers, spurred a congressional investigation and ultimately contributed to the downfall of President Richard Nixon. Watergate certainly increased the perceived value of investigative reporting in the 1970s, although Woodward and Bernstein hardly invented this genre of reporting. The origins of investigative reporting at the turn of the century rest with Lincoln Steffens, Upton Sinclair, Ida Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, and other muckrakers who exposed corruption in government and business during the Progressive Era.[3]

Edwin Diamond, in his history of newspapers, argued that little or no sustained muckraking or investigative reporting occurred between 1913 and 1960. Despite dramatic changes in society as a result of the Great Depression and World War II, newspapers were complacent and content to maintain the status quo.[4] James Aucoin also has documented press subservience to business and government institutions from the 1920s through the 1950s. In the 1960s, however, a series of traumatic events beginning with the Civil Rights Movement, followed by political assassinations, and culminating with opposition to the War in Southeast Asia peaked the interest of younger reporters in the muckraking tradition, especially after the 1964 Supreme Court decision in *New*

York Times v. Sullivan largely freed investigative reporters from the fear of libel suits by public figures. This investigative spirit climaxed with Watergate and the fame of Woodward and Bernstein.[5] Watergate reporting spawned such investigative reporting in the 1970s as Seymour Hersh's revelations of domestic spying by the CIA, Daniel Schorr's CBS expose of CIA assassination plots, and Jack Anderson's report on CIA involvement with Howard Hughes to retrieve a sunken Soviet submarine. Times were quickly changing for investigative reporters, though. Kathryn Olmsted has documented the efforts of elite media institutions, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, to discredit these reporters and their revelations in an effort to stabilize the government agencies left undermined in the wash of Watergate reporting.[6]

Certainly by the mid-1980s news managers questioned the value of investigative reporting. After all, it was expensive and time-consuming; one or more reporters often took months to complete a single series of stories. Others questioned whether readers were interested in this serious journalism. In a 1990 speech to members of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Norman Pearlstine, then *Wall Street Journal* managing editor, asserted that declining readership combined with reader disinterest in investigative pieces was prompting many news managers to discourage investigative reporting.[7] The threat of lawsuits, however, frightened news executives and forced them to draw away from investigative reporting by the late-1980s. Some media critics believe judgments against news organizations and settlements in high-profile cases contributed to a decline in all investigative reporting. Bruce Sanford, a First Amendment attorney, predicted after the 1995 Food Lion verdict, "You can expect journalists in the wake of this to give us more stories about Dennis Rodman and Madonna instead of more stories that are important to us." Even seasoned reporters who were simply questioned by attorneys were losing their interest in pursuing investigative projects. "Many journalists are gripped by a crisis of confidence as they face serious professional questions, legal challenges and public skepticism," journalist and media critic James Boylan observed in 1997. "The targets of these investigations, notably corporations, are willing to throw every legal resource into retaliation."[8]

Not only does this willingness of targets of investigations to exploit every legal alternative make such stories financially risky but so does concentration within the media industry itself. In addition to increased corporate pressure for profits--profits obviously threatened by legal responses to investigative reporting--media managers have a more obvious reason to consider investigative reporting a losing proposition. Few corporate media executives are anxious to assign reporters to investigations of a sister company owned by the same umbrella company as owns the media outlet. The media's traditional watchdog role of scrutinizing society's institutions may not include turning an eye on itself. As a result of mergers, moreover, the new owners of media outlets often have little experience or understanding of news values.[9] A recent survey of editors and publishers commissioned by *Editor & Publisher* found that news executives themselves, generally bullish about the business aspects of the newspaper industry, were critical of newspaper content. Of the news executives surveyed, 56 percent felt the press was two cynical, 48 percent considered coverage too shallow and inadequate, 66 percent thought the press concentrated on politics and personality to the exclusion of policy issues, and 31 percent said the press leans to sensationalism.[10]

Still, reports of the demise of investigative reporting may be exaggerated. The majority of 550 journalists questioned in a 1986 survey by Investigative Reporters and Editors, conducted during the period covered by this study, said investigative reporting increased at their news outlets in the 1980s. At 71 percent of newspapers, investigative techniques were used more widely by newsroom beat reporters than they were during the previous five years.[11] Former *Chicago Tribune* editor and press critic James Squires told an 1990 IRE conference that investigative reporting can thrive if reporters demonstrate to news managers that it is lucrative.[12] Even Pearlstine, who in 1990 painted a grim picture for the future of investigative reporting, has said newspapers "which do remain committed to really telling it as it is can find a great deal of success."[13] And attendance at the June 1998 annual IRE conference in New Orleans reached a record high; 1,130 reporters and editors attended.[14]

Despite continued interest among journalists for this admired form of reporting, the debate about investigative reporting continues. Doug Underwood argues new corporate approaches have caused many newspapers to pander to perceived reader interests based on marketing surveys rather than traditional news judgment. This fixation on the reader has led to an overall decline in newspapers and news quality as executives reorganize newsrooms to serve this new corporate marketing philosophy.[15] James Fallows, on the other hand, believes the increasing greed of celebrity journalists, accustomed to large speaking fees, reduces their interest in reporting the news. He further says a jaded attitude and elitism on the part of many reporters has replaced the genuine skepticism solid reporting requires.[16] Squires maintains the press has lost interest in informing the public and, similar to television, now is dedicated to entertaining its consumers for profit. Responsibility for the news has been transferred from professional journalists to business managers.[17] The present study, focused on six rather typical metropolitan newspapers in Ohio, employing content analysis to examine quantitatively whether prestigious investigative reporting has declined or not since 1980 as a result of this blending of corporate and journalistic interests, as well as other marketplace factors, and to examine whether metropolitan papers have replaced expensive investigative reporting with less costly, market-driven enterprise features.

Literature Review

The recent critics of corporate newspapers base their analyses and commentaries on their own experience as reporters and newsroom managers. In many ways they follow in a long tradition of media critics best represented today by Ben Bagdikian.[18] The latest edition of Bagdikian's classic indictment of media concentration and corporate influence on media content contains a sobering statistic regarding the speed and extent of media concentration. He notes that in 1984, when he published the first edition of *The Media Monopoly,* fifty corporations controlled most of the media in the United States but that the number of corporations dropped to ten by 1997.[19]

Not all former journalists and academic researchers are as concerned about the effects of media consolidation as Bagdikian. In the most thorough and sophisticated analyses of corporate media available to date, David Pearce Demers has questioned the purported decline in newspaper quality attributed by media critics to corporate takeovers and market-driven journalism. In reviewing empirical and descriptive studies of the quality of newspaper content and newsroom working conditions, Demers found some support for charges that chain newspapers concentrate less on local news and place greater emphasis on profits; but the evidence at best was mixed with regard to any decline in editorial quality or independence. He further argues that newspapers and the working lives of journalists have improved as newspaper chains and modern newspapers have adopted the principles and practices of the modern corporation. Demers notes that, while newspapers have changed, they have done so as part of the managerial revolution that has affected all institutions in the twentieth century.[20]

Although there have been a few efforts to measure impact of media concentration on newspaper content or simply to describe change in content over time, they have focused on broad measures such as diversity of editorial opinion, diversity of sources, or size of news hole. Generally the results of these efforts to link content quality to competitive status, ownership pattern, or market size have proven inconclusive. Numerous researchers have investigated the impact of competitive status and ownership on editorial independence. With the exception of John Busterna and Kathleen Hansen's finding of little difference between chain and independent patterns of newspaper endorsement for presidential candidates in the 1976 through 1984 elections, studies of editorial independence suggest that chain papers are more likely to endorse or take positions on matters of public policy and less likely to vary in their endorsements or positions.[21] In another recent study that found evidence of growing limits on diversity of opinion in metropolitan papers, Lawrence Soley demonstrated that the *New York Times,* the *Los Angeles Times,* and the *Washington Post* substantially increased their use of expert sources from 106 in 1978 to 308 in 1990. Soley argued that use of experts limits diversity of opinion and reduces the readers' involvement in debate.[22]

Other studies have yielded contradictory results with regard to the news content of newspapers relative to ownership patterns. Barry Litman and Janet Bridges have found moderate support for the traditional belief that the presence of competition improves newspaper performance.[23] Maxwell McCombs found little difference in the news content of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* before and after the *Cleveland Press* closed.[24] Stephen Lacy, in a study of umbrella competition involving 114 newspapers, found that as intercity competition increased the news about the local city also increased;[25] but Stephen Lacy and Frederick Fico, in a national study of content quality in chain and independent newspapers, found little difference and concluded differences were related to individual management policies rather than ownership patterns.[26] Theodore Glasser, David Allen, and Elizabeth Blanks did find evidence that chain ownership increased content homogeneity in their study of coverage by Knight-Ridder papers of the Gary Hart story, which the *Miami Herald* first published.[27] David Coulson and Anne Hansen, in a quantitative case study of news content in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* before and after it was purchased by Gannett, found that despite a substantial increase in the paper's news hole after the Gannett purchase there was a corresponding decline in length of stories published, a decline in the ratio of space devoted to hard news and staff-written stories, and increased dependency on wire service stories.[28] In a study of front-page content in ninety-six daily newspapers between 1986 and 1993, Janet Bridges and Lamar Bridges found coverage of local civic news had declined between 1986 and 1993.[29]

In an earlier exploratory study comparing the amount and character of enterprise and investigative reporting in 1980 and 1995 in three major metropolitan papers—the *Chicago Tribune, Philadelphia Inquirer,* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*—the authors of the present study found that investigative reporting represented a small proportion of published enterprise stories appearing on the front pages of these three newspapers. Investigative reporting accounted for about a fifth of the enterprise work highlighted on the front pages of these three large metropolitan dailies during March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995. Moreover, although the total number of enterprise stories appearing in the issues analyzed was equivalent for 1980 and 1995, the number of those enterprise stories coded as investigative declined dramatically from 34.7 percent in 1980 to 9.9 percent in 1995.[30]

Methodology

To determine whether the patterns of enterprise and investigative reporting found in this earlier exploratory study of three large metropolitan papers reflected trends in metropolitan journalism more generally, this content analysis examined changes during the same fifteen years in the amount and character of extensively researched, sourced, documented, and locally-produced enterprise journalism--particularly prestigious investigative stories--found in Ohio's six largest metropolitan newspapers. The 358 locally produced enterprise stories analyzed in this study were captured from the front pages of issues published during March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995.[31] These three months were randomly selected from 1980, a year by which time Watergate-inspired investigative reporting had ebbed; and the same three months were then selected from 1995,[32] a year by which time corporate mergers, acquisitions, and closures had eliminated what little newspaper competition still remained in 1980. The six Ohio papers reported 1995 daily circulations ranging from a high of 396,773 to a low of 147,526. They included the *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* a noncompetitive Advance Publications (Newhouse) paper and the country's eighteenth largest paper in circulation; the independent and noncompetitive *Columbus Dispatch,* ranked forty-second in the country; Gannett's *Cincinnati Enquirer,* a JOA paper ranked fifty-sixth in the country; the noncompetitive *Dayton Daily News,* a Cox newspaper ranked seventy-first in the nation; Knight-Ridder's noncompetitive *Akron Beacon Journal,* the country's seventy-sixth largest daily; and the noncompetitive *Toledo Blade,* an independent paper ranked seventy-seventh in the nation.[33]

Stories emblematic of difficult, time-consuming, heavily researched and sourced, public-service journalism were examined as examples of enterprise journalism and were analyzed in terms of number of stories, amount of space, subject matter, and information-gathering techniques employed. Two graduate students were instructed to error on the side of inclusion and capture all eligible enterprise stories from the front pages of the 1,092 issues of the six Ohio papers published during the two three-month periods. The authors later removed stories that did not qualify as enterprise journalism from the sample prior to coding.

The definition of investigative reporting is subjective; reporters, editors, and readers have assigned it varying definitions. Here, in analyzing the investigative and enterprise stories gathered, the authors relied on definitions of investigative reporting by John Ullman, William Gaines, Clark Mollenhoff, and John Wicklein. Gaines and Wicklein defined it as reporting that reveals something contrary to versions of events offered by government, business, or other authority or reporting that addresses a social ill. Ullman and Mollenhoff, and for many years the Investigative Reporters and Editors, have defined it as reporting that exposes wrongdoing or violations of law, regulation, codes of standards, or common understanding of decency; is the work of the reporter rather than others; treats a subject of importance to readers; and results from attempts by others to hide or keep something secret.[34] In addition, the authors defined stories as investigative if they fit the above criteria but the information, while not secret, was nevertheless previously undisclosed and discovered by the reporter through a variety of standard investigative reporting techniques, including interviews, unidentified sources, published materials, leaked documents, public documents, and so forth. Whether investigative reporting requires the element of secrecy has been a matter of debate in IRE. Investigative reporter and editor Bob Greene argues that uncovering secret information separates investigative reporting from other forms of enterprise reporting. Steve Weinberg, former IRE executive director, thinks requiring the element of secrecy in any definition would disqualify much of what he considers classic and compelling investigative reporting.[35] This wider definition recognizes efforts that go beyond unlocking closed files and into ferreting out congressional testimony, government records, and other information that is open and available but not previously reviewed.[36]

In classifying enterprise and investigative reporting here, the authors adhered to the slightly broader definition advocated by Weinberg, but in this study they also specifically noted stories that contained secret or hidden information obtained by reporters. Thus if an enterprise story appearing during the selected months involved extensive examination of a topic, used several of the standard techniques of investigative reporting, contained a variety of sources, and reported on illegal or unethical actions or other offenses, it was coded as an example of investigative reporting. Those investigative stories that relied on hidden or secreted information were distinguished from those based on available but unnoticed or unreported information. All sidebars and related pieces accompanying stories deemed enterprise or investigative were treated as part of a single report rather than as separate stories. Those stories that referred to change or action resulting from the newspaper's investigative pieces, stories that often retell significant aspects and revelations of the earlier story or series, were coded as accomplishment stories, a subcategory of investigative reporting. In evaluating investigative stories, this study also identified the main focus (who or what was targeted), all investigative techniques employed to produce the story, and the type of art, if any, that accompanied the story. The focus or target of the investigative stories was coded using a variety of categories of public and private individuals and entities. Art was categorized as photographs; line art or illustrations; and charts, tables, or informational graphics.

All items defined as enterprise stories but not complying with the definition of investigative reporting were included. Headline, date, length, and subject were noted, as was also the case in analyzing the investigative stories. In evaluating the stories selected for analysis, the authors classified stories as enterprise pieces if they involved extensive work, detail, numerous sources, and had a news focus. Feature stories, columns, opinion pieces, personality profiles, political commentary or analysis, and localization of national or international news were excluded. All coding was completed by the authors. Intercoder reliability, based on percentage of agreement,[37] 94.8 percent and ranged from a low of 80 percent for "focus of story" and the two information-gathering techniques of "unidentified sources" and "documents leaked" to 100 percent for "newspaper," "date," "page," presence of "photographs" or "line art" or "infographics," and information-gathering techniques of "personal interview," "surveillance," "documents provided on request," "whistleblower as source," "library or published materials," and "going undercover." Level of significance was set at .05 for the study.

Results

This study of enterprise and investigative stories in the *Akron Beacon Journal, Cincinnati Enquirer, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Columbus Dispatch, Dayton Daily News,* and *Toledo Blade* found support for Demers' assertion that corporatized newspapers are more financially and managerially able to offer product quality and diversity of opinion that supports their communities and allows for controlled social change.[38] Both enterprise reporting overall and investigative reporting increased at these Ohio metropolitan papers from 1980 to 1995. Enterprise stories increased by nearly 49 percent. Investigative reporting found in the six Ohio newspapers increased substantially--by nearly 48 percent for those based on available information and by more than 14 percent for those based on hidden information. The focus of the investigative stories in the Ohio papers in the 1980 and 1995 periods was overwhelmingly on public institutions, officials, and employees rather than their private counterparts--although the targeting of private institutions also increased from 1980 to 1995 in the Ohio papers. Personal interviews and documents provided on request were the most frequently employed investigative techniques in the stories examined. Use of experts for analysis and computer-aided reporting both increased markedly from 1980 to 1995.

Of the enterprise stories found in the newspapers serving the six largest cities in Ohio, the 87 stories classified as investigative reporting, based either on hidden or available information, represented more than 24 percent of the 358 enterprise stories published in April, May, and November of 1980 and 1995 (Tables 1 and 2). The six Ohio newspapers demonstrated considerable improvement, increasing the overall number of published enterprise stories from 144 in the 1980 period to 214 in the 1995 period, a 48.6 percent increase. The only newspaper not contributing to this overall increase was the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, which published nine (22.5 percent) fewer enterprise stories in 1995 than 1980. The *Cincinnati Enquirer, Columbus Dispatch*, and the *Dayton Daily News* all increased their output of enterprise reporting from 65 percent to as much as 255 percent.

As a group the Ohio papers increased their production of investigative stories from the 1980 to 1995 period by more than 35 percent. The six papers published a total of eighty-seven investigative stories in the periods examined: 37 in 1980 and 50 in 1995. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* and the *Dayton Daily News*, however, were responsible for all of this increase. Investigative reporting increased from three to 11 stories (267 percent) at the *Enquirer* and from two to 14 stories (600 percent) at the *Daily News,* but declined from 14 percent to as much as 67 percent at each of the other four Ohio papers. Despite the overall increase in investigative stories found in the 1995 period, however, the proportion of investigative stories based on hidden information relative to those based on available information declined substantially during the 1995 period. In 1980 nearly 61 percent of the investigative stories were based on hidden information; however, in 1995 only 47 percent of the investigative stories found in the Ohio papers were based on hidden information (Table 1).

The amount of space devoted by the Ohio papers to both enterprise and investigative reporting also increased from the 1980 to 1995 period (Table 3). The 358 enterprise stories published in the Ohio newspapers generated 16,710 paragraphs, 5,177 in 1980 and 11,533 in 1995--an increase of nearly 123 percent. Of these 16,710 paragraphs, 4,013 paragraphs (24 percent) were devoted to investigative reporting--1,464 in 1980 and 2,549 in 1995, more than a 74 percent increase. Space devoted to investigative stories based on hidden information declined slightly, down 5 percent from 475 paragraphs in 1980 to 453 in 1995. There was, however, a substantial rise in the number of paragraphs devoted to investigative reporting based on available information, which increased nearly 112 percent from 989 paragraphs in 1980 to 2,096 in 1995. Nevertheless, space devoted both to investigative stories based on hidden information and those derived from available information dropped markedly from 1980 to 1995 as a percentage of the total paragraphs devoted to enterprise reporting. In the 1980 period, the 1,464 paragraphs devoted to investigative stories constituted more than 28 percent of the 5,177 paragraphs in all enterprise stories coded. In the 1995 period, the 4,645 paragraphs devoted to investigative stories represented slightly more than 22 percent of the 11,533 paragraphs in all enterprise stories coded.

The enterprise stories published in the Ohio papers in the two periods studied ranged in length from an eight-paragraph accomplishment story to a 319-paragraph general enterprise story, and averaged 47.04 paragraphs. The *Akron Beacon Journal* published the longest enterprise stories, averaging 60.89 paragraphs; and the *Columbus Dispatch* published the shortest, averaging 37.61 paragraphs in length. Investigative stories based on available information averaged 55.16 paragraphs, considerably longer than the average for all enterprise stories and dramatically longer than the average of 30.93 paragraphs for investigative stories based on hidden information (Table 3).

The frequency with which investigative stories were accompanied or highlighted by pieces of art in the Ohio newspapers increased slightly from 1980 to 1995. In the 1980 period, the 37 investigative were accented by 35 pieces of art, a 94.6 percent rate of graphic presentation (Table 3). In 1995 the Ohio papers accompanied 50 investigative stories with 56 photographs, art and illustrations, or informational graphics—a 112 percent rate of graphic treatment. Interestingly, in 1980 investigative stories based on hidden information were slightly more likely to receive graphic treatment than those based on available information. In 1995, however, the reverse was the case by a substantial margin

Investigative stories found in the Ohio papers from March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995 focused most often on public institutions, officials, and employees. In 1980 public institutions were the focus in 17 and public officials or employees in six, private institutions in four and private executives or employees in four, and tax-exempt institutions in one and officials or employees of tax-exempt institutions in six of 37 investigative stories (Table 4). This emphasis on public figures and institutions increased markedly in investigative stories from the 1995 Ohio newspapers examined. Both public institutions and public officials were the focus more than twice as frequently in 1995 as in 1980 while the targeting of private and tax-exempt institutions and individuals actually dropped. Public officials were targeted in 38 and public officials and employees in 13; private institutions in eight; and tax-exempt institutions in one of the 62 investigative stories from March, April, and November of 1995.

Local public institutions were the primary targets in 1980 and secondary targets in 1995, and state public institutions were the primary focus in 1995 (Table 4). Public officials ranked third as targets of investigative reports in both 1980 and 1995, although in 1980 they shared this ranking with private business institutions. In 1995 the Ohio papers also showed a shift from focusing on individuals—especially individuals at private or tax-exempt institutions—and toward targeting institutions in the investigative stories. Despite the increase from 1980 to 1995 in the number of public individuals targeted, overall investigative stories from the Ohio newspapers that had focused in 1980 on individuals in 14 of 39 stories (36 percent) in 1995 targeted individuals in only 13 of the 62 reports (21 percent). All 13 of these individuals in 1995 were associated with public institutions (Table 4).

This study of the Ohio newspapers found that investigative reporters most frequently depended on gathering information from personal interviews and provided documents (Table 6). Personal interviews, ranked second in 1980, was the primary investigative technique in 1995. Documents provided to reporters on request ranked first in 1980 and second in 1995. Unidentified sources dropped from third in 1980 to fourth in 1995, replaced by the use of experts for the purpose of analysis. Also ranked fourth in 1980 and tied as the fourth most frequent investigative technique in 1995 was the use of library or other published materials. Computer-aided reporting was a more prevalent investigative technique in 1995.

Discussion

Investment in all forms of enterprise reporting--investigative stories based on hidden information or available information, accomplishment stories reviewing investigative series and glorying in their results, or other enterprise stories--by the Ohio metropolitan newspapers examined in this study increased between 1980 and 1995. The 144 enterprise stories published by the six papers in three months of 1980 grew to 214 published during the same months of 1995, an increase of more than 49 percent (Table 1). Non-investigative--but still heavily researched, sourced, and documented--enterprise stories grew from 107 in the 1980 period to 153 stories in the 1995 period, an increase of more than 43 percent. These increases would seem to support those, such as Demers, who argue metropolitan newspapers have improved as the industry has become increasingly concentrated and less competitive and as the managerial revolution has penetrated the newsrooms. These increases in enterprise stories would seem to support those who argue today's newspapers are providing readers with a better, more sophisticated, and market-oriented product.

The picture this study presented regarding the amount and nature of the investigative reporting published in these six Ohio metropolitan newspapers, however, was not entirely sanguine. Not only did this most-prized form of watchdog journalism shrink as a percentage of all enterprise reporting, but it has also changed in character. Together the six papers published 87 investigative reports based on either hidden or available information, showing an increase of 35.1 percent from 1980 to 1995. The percentage of investigative stories based on hidden information, however, declined from 37.8 percent in the 1980 period to 32 percent in the 1995 period. By 1995, as a group, these papers produced considerably more quality enterprise pieces, substantially more safe investigative stories based on available information, but in the larger picture had become less aggressive in their efforts to expose secreted wrongs, unethical behaviors, and social ills.

For the six newspapers as a group, the focus of the published investigative stories changed as well. First, the target of investigative stories in 1995 was more likely to be a public entity or an individual connected with a public entity. Of the 37 investigative stories from 1980, 23 (62.2 percent) focused on public institutions or public individuals (Table 4). Of the 62 investigative stories from 1995, however, 51 reports (82.3 percent) targeted public organizations and people associated with such institutions. Second, even more striking in terms of the difference in the character of investigative stories published during March, April, and November of 1980 and those published during the same months of 1995, the six newspapers increased their focus on institutions and reduced their emphasis on individuals. Of the 37 investigative stories published in 1980, 22 (59.5 percent) targeted institutions rather than individuals; but of the 62 published in 1995, 47 (75 percent) focused on institutions rather than individuals. It is important to consider this shift in focus from private targets and individuals to public targets and institutions in the context of a smaller portion of all enterprise stories in 1995 than in 1980 qualifying as investigative stories and a smaller portion of those investigative stories in 1995 than in 1980 being based on hidden information. While the six papers produced substantially more enterprise reporting in 1995, they also showed themselves as far more risk averse in their enterprise reporting in 1995 than they were in 1980. The shifts between 1980 and 1995 in the investigative techniques employed at these Ohio newspapers also reflected this increased aversion to risk. Use of riskier techniques such as unidentified sources, leaked documents, surveillance, and whistleblowers dropped in frequency; use of safer techniques such as library and published materials, personal interviews, expert analysis, and computer-aided reporting all rose in frequency (Table 3.5).

This content analysis, in snapshot fashion, only described the enterprise reporting found in six Ohio dailies during three months of two years separated by a period of 15 years. The numbers presented did suggest these newspapers are redirecting their reporting away from the investigation of public and social issues, substituting carefully researched enterprise stories for hard-hitting investigative series. Examination of the qualitative aspects of the investigative and other enterprise stories appearing in the three papers during April, May, and November of 1980 and 1995 further suggests that an exchange of thoroughly researched soft news for similarly well-researched hard news did occur during the fifteen years between 1980 and 1995.

The number of such intelligent, in-depth, and well-researched enterprise pieces not only continued to appear in the six newspapers but actually increased substantially as the number of investigative reports declined as a percentage of all enterprise work. In the two periods studied from 1980 and 1995, these papers published in-depth enterprise stories on such topics of interest to the family as child abuse and drug abuse; consumer-oriented stories about the effects of tax legislation on families; and many explanatory stories about new trends, laws, and regulations. News executives at these papers obviously are concerned with offering their readers information of practical value: comprehensive and information-rich stories readers can use in solving problems they regularly confront in their daily lives. Typical of such pieces was multi-part coverage the *Dayton Daily News* published in 1995 about teenage sex and pregnancy and a statistically rich feature in the same year explaining the retail strategy of Christmas discounting.[39]

Some of the longer enterprise stories of 1995 examined how social changes affect people and institutions. In "Under the Microscope," a two-part series, the *Columbus Dispatch* examined dramatic upheavals in medical industries, focusing on their effects on patients.[40] The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* examined the growing influence and importance of the city's Arab-Americans in a four-part series.[41]

The displacement of investigative reports by these reader-oriented enterprise stories, no matter how carefully crafted and comprehensively researched, certainly lends credence to Underwood's critique of a profit-driven newspaper industry.[42] Their increased presence, along with a numerical increase in investigative reports at some of the smaller metropolitan papers examined, however, offers evidence that reports of the death of serious reporting by watchdog newspapers have been greatly exaggerated.

Interestingly the smaller metropolitan papers, such as the *Dayton Daily News* and the *Cincinnati Enquirer,* and not the major metropolitan dailies, such as the *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* a paper more akin to the metropolitan dailies the authors examined in an earlier exploratory study, ran significantly more investigative stories in 1995 than 1980. For a piece published in March 1995, for instance, reporters at the *Enquirer* ferreted out hidden information about a "pancaking" scheme by state legislators to conceal illegal speaking fees.[43] Reporters at the *Akron Beacon Journal* went undercover as customers and checked public records of city and county inspectors to uncover overcharging at area grocery stores using electronic scanners at checkout.[44] These smaller metropolitan newspapers frequently used sophisticated searches of public documents to obtain their material. The *Dayton Daily News,* for instance, used public documents, leaked documents, and computer-assisted reporting in a series of articles that exposed salary and other irregularities involving Wright State University programs on the island of Tortola in the British Virgin Islands.[44] And the *Columbus Dispatch,* depending on an unidentified source and an extensive review of public records, exposed the failure of Ohio State University professors to report, as required, earnings from outside consulting and private businesses.[46] News executives at these papers obviously have not abandoned all interest in investigative reporting. Still, one wonders if they would now devote the time and manpower the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* devoted in 1980 to a courageous series exposing wrongdoing and illegalities by the president of the Ohio AFL-CIO. *Plain Dealer* reporters employed anonymous sources and public documents to glean information for that story.[47]

The results from this study of Ohio metropolitan papers—combined with those from the authors' earlier study of enterprise and investigative reporting in three major metropolitan dailies—strongly suggested that heavily researched enterprise reporting was, if anything, more important in 1995 than 1980 at metropolitan dailies and that investigative reporting, even if less aggressive, still found a prominent place on most of their front pages. Together, however, these two studies represent only a limited first effort to address the charges and counter charges of media critics and researchers regarding the effect of market-driven and managerially sophisticated newspapers on the content of the contemporary daily newspaper. These results, along with results from the authors' earlier study, recommend further examination of enterprise and investigative reporting on the front pages of a far larger number of metropolitan newspapers—carefully selected to allow analysis by ownership pattern, circulation size, and geographic location. Additionally, a study of a larger sample of papers should increase the number of data points to more precisely track content changes over this 15-year period. Such an expanded study obviously would provide a better indication of whether the conflicting results the authors found between larger- and smaller-circulation dailies reflects a national pattern. Did market-driven journalism actually cause a decline in investigative reporting at large-circulation and an increase at smaller-circulation papers? If so, would such a finding explain why Underwood, Bagdikian, and McManus are are so critical and why Demers's findings are so supportive of the managerial revolution in the nation's newsrooms.

Notes

1. Doug Underwood, *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom: How Marketers and Managers Are Reshaping Today's Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); John McManus, *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1994); and James Squires, *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers* (New York: Times Books, 1993). Others who have written on this topic include Erik Barnouw, et al., *Conglomerates and the Media* (New York: The New Press, 1997); Peter Benjaminson, *Death in the Afternoon: America's Newspaper Giants Struggle for Survival* (Kansas City and New York: Andrews, McNeel & Parker, 1984); Ellis Cose, *The Press* (New York: William Morrow, 1989); James Fallows *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (New York: Pantheon, 1996); William A. Hachten, *The Troubles of Journalism: A Critical Look at What's Right and Wrong with the Press* (Mahwah, N.J. and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998); Penn Kimball, *Downsizing the News: Network Cutbacks in the Nation's Capital* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Andrew Kreig, *Spiked: How Chain Management Corrupted America's Oldest Newspaper* (Old Saybrook, Conn.: Peregrine Press, 1987); and Richard McCord, *The Chain Gang: One Newspaper Versus the Gannett Empire* (Columbia, Missouri and London: University of Missouri Press, 1996). Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney address this topic with regards to international media in *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism* (London and Washington, D.C.: Cassell, 1997); and the corporate impact on Canadian newspapers in analyzed in a series of essays in *Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story*, ed. Walter Stewart (Edmondton, Alberta: Hurtig Publishers, 1980).

2. Pete Hamill, *News Is a Verb: Journalism at the End of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Ballantine, 1998), pp. 28-29.

3. For a brief history of investigative reporting, see Underwood, pp. 38-54; Leonard Downey, Jr., *The New Muckrakers* (Washington, D.C.: Pantheon, 1996); and David L. Protess, et al., *The Journalism of Outrage: Investigative Reporting and Agenda Building in America* (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1991), pp. 29-59. Standard works on the Muckraking Era include Louis Filler's *Crusader for American Liberalism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939) and C. C. Regier's *The Era of the Muckrakers* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1932). For a detailed discussion of the work of investigative reporters in the early 1970s see James H. Dygert, *The Investigative Journalists: Folk Heroes of a New Era* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

4.Edwin Diamond, *Good News, Bad News* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1980), pp. 232-40.

5. James C. Aucoin, "The Re-emergence of American Investigative Journalism 1960-1975," *Journalism History*, 21:3-13 (1995).

6. Kathryn Olmsted, "'An American Conspiracy': The Post-Watergate Press and the CIA," *Journalism History,* 19:51-58 (1993).

7. For summaries of criticisms leveled by news managers, see, for example, Mark Fitzgerald, "Finances Seen Behind the Investigative Slowdown," *Editor & Publisher*, 4 July 1987, p. 10. Pearlstine is quoted in Staci D. Kramer, "Investigative Reporting in the '90s," *Editor & Publisher,* 21 July 1990, pp. 17, 41.

8. Jury judgments in several cases against the media in the late 1990s have indicated that juries are sometimes sympathetic with the targets of investigative pieces. In 1997, a jury in North Carolina awarded the Food Lion grocery chain $5.5 million in punitive damages after ABC's *Prime Time Live* used undercover reporting techniques to show the chain sold tainted meat. The jury found the reporting techniques deceptive. The same year, ABC settled a $10 billion lawsuit with Philip Morris and R. J. Reynolds Tobacco for a story it aired stating the companies spiked their product with significant amounts of addictive nicotine. See James Boylan, "Punishing the Press: The Public Passes Some Tough Judgments on Libel, Fairness and 'Fraud,'" *Columbia Journalism Review,* March-April 1997, p. 24. Boylan offers his own opinions on the case and also quotes Sanford. See, also, ABC News President's comments on the chilling effect of the Food Lion verdict in his commentary in "Hidden Cameras Find the Truth," *New York Times,* 1 February 1997, p. 19; and media critic Howard Kurtz' discussion of the ABC-Philip Morris case in "Long-Term Effect of ABC Settlement Concerns Critics," *Washington Post,* 23 August 1995, p.4.

9. *Columbia Journalism Review* sponsored in 1997 a panel discussion of the possible ramifications of increasing consolidation of media outlets. Media critic Alex Jones commented here that people in control of the news may have no understanding of it. See Andie Tucher, "The Real Dangers of Conglomerate Control: A *Columbia Journalism Review* Forum Looks at the Bad News about Corporate Synergy," *Columbia Journalism Review,* March-April 1997, p. 46.

10. Robert Neuwirth, "Press Flawed, News Chiefs Admit," *Editor & Publisher,* 17 January 1998, pp. 10-13.

11. M. L. Stein, "Investigative Reporting--Alive and Well," *Editor & Publisher,* 5 July 1986, pp.9, 31.

12. Mark Fitzgerald, "Former Editor Touts Investigative Reporting," *Editor & Publisher,* 27 October 1990, p. 26.

13. Kramer, "Investigative Reporting in the '90s," pp. 17, 41.

14. M. L. Stein, "Investigative Reporting Is Alive and Well," *Editor & Publisher,* 13 June 1998, p. 21.

15. Underwood, pp. xiii, 131.

16. See Fallows.

17. Squires, p. 211.

18. This critical and polemical tradition includes attacks on corporate press bias by Upton Sinclair, *The Brass Check* (Pasadena, Calif.: Published by Author, 1920); Silas Bent, *Ballyhoo: The Voice of the Press* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927); Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1965); George Seldes, *Freedom of the Press* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1935) and *Lords of the Press* (New York: Julian Messner, 1938); Harold L. Ickes, *America's House of Lords: An Inquiry into the Freedom of the Press* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939); The Commission on Freedom of the Press, *A Free and Responsible Press: A General Report on Mass Communication: Newspapers, Radio, Motion Pictures, Magazines, and Books* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947); James Reston, *The Artillery of the Press: Its Influence on American Foreign Policy* (New York and Evanston, 1967); and Carl E. Lindstrom, *The Fading American Newspaper* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960)

19. Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 5th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p. xi.

20. David Pearce Demers, *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper: Fact or Fiction?* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1996).

21. Gerard H. Borstel, "Ownership, Competition and Comment in 20 Small Dailies," *Journalism Quarterly*, 33:220-22 (1956); Daniel B. Wackman, Donald M. Gillmor, Cecilie Gaziano and Everette E. Dennis, "Chain Newspaper Autonomy as Reflected in Presidential Campaign Endorsements," *Journalism Quarterly*, 52:411-20 (1975); Ralph R. Thrift Jr., "How Chain Ownership Affects Editorial Vigor of Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly*, 54:327-31 (1977); Byron St. Dizier, Editorial Page Editors and Endorsements: Chain-owned vs. Independent Newspapers, *Newspaper Research Journal*, 8(1):63-68 (1986); Cecilie Gaziano, "Chain Newspaper Homogeneity and Presidential Endorsements, 1972-1988," *Journalism Quarterly*, 66:836-45 (1989); John C. Busterna and Kathleen A. Hansen, "Presidential Endorsement Patterns by Chain-Owned Papers, 1976-84," *Journalism Quarterly*, 67::286-94 (1990); and Roya Akhavan-Majid, Anita Rife, and Sheila Gopinath, "Chain Ownership and Editorial Independence: A Case Study of Gannett Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly*, 68:59-66 (1991).

22. Lawrence C. Soley, "Pundits in Print: 'Experts' and Their Use in Newspaper Stories," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 15(2):65-75 (1994).

23. Barry R. Litman and Janet Bridges, "An Economic Analysis of Daily Newspaper Performance," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 7(3):9-26 (1986).

24. Maxwell McCombs, "Effect of Monopoly in Cleveland on Diversity of Newspaper Content," *Journalism Quarterly*, 64:740-44 (1987).

25. Stephen Lacy, "The Impact of Intercity Competition on Daily Newspaper Content," *Journalism Quarterly*, 65:399-406 (1988).

26. Stephen Lacy and Frederick Fico, "Newspaper Quality & Ownership: Rating the Groups," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 11(2): 42-56 (1990).

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31. It was assumed that news managers would showcase on the front page their newspaper's investments in time-consuming, expensive enterprise and investigative reporting.

32. Randomly selecting three whole months of each newspaper, rather than selecting a constructed sample throughout each year, allowed for the capture of whole series of investigative stories in their entirety and reduced the chance of missing investigative stories altogether.

33. In 1980 the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* competed with the *Cleveland Press*, and the *Columbus Dispatch* was in a joint operating agreement with the *Columbus Citizen-Journal*. *1981 Editor & Publisher International Year Book; 1996 Editor & Publisher International Year Book.*

34. See Hiley H. Ward, *Reporting in Depth* (Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield Publishing, 1991), p. 2; William Gaines, *Investigative Reporting for Print and Broadcast* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1994), pp. 1-3; and John Ullman, *Investigative Reporting: Advanced Methods and Techniques* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 2-3. For a current explanation of this IRE definition, see the *IRE Journal*, January-February 1996, pp. 2-3.

35. *IRE Journal*, p. 2.

36. *IRE Journal*, p. 3.

37. Guido H. Stempel III and Bruce H. Westley, eds. *Research in Mass Communication*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), p. 133.

38. Demers, pp.308-23.

39. *Dayton Daily News*, 30 April 1995 and 24 November 1995.

40. *Columbus Dispatch*, 13 March-14 March 1995.

41. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 26 November-29 November 1995.

42. Underwood, *MBAs in the Newsroom.*

43. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 17 March 1995.

44. *Akron Beacon Journal*, 2 April 1995.

45. *Dayton Daily News*, 2 April, 5 April, 19 April 1995.

46. *Columbus Dispatch*, 12 November 1980.

47. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 23 November-28 November 1980.

Table 1 Type of enterprise stories published in the *Akron Beacon Journal, Cincinnati Enquirer, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Columbus Dispatch, Dayton Daily News,* and *Toledo Blade* during March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995

Type of enterprise story	1980 stories	1995 stories	Average paragraph
Akron Beacon Journal	31	39	60.89
Investigative (hidden)	4 (12.9%)	2 (5.1%)	42.33
Investigative (available)	2 (6.5%)	6 (15.4%)	72.75
Accomplishment	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	. . .
Other enterprise	25 (80.6%)	31 (79.5%)	61.18
Cincinnati Enquirer	11	39	45.88
Investigative (hidden)	0 (0.0%)	7 (17.9%)	26.86
Investigative (available)	3 (237.3%)	4 (10.3%)	59.00
Accomplishment	0 (0.0%)	3 (7.7%)	16.67
Other enterprise	8 (72.7%)	25 (69.4%)	49.79
Cleveland Plain Dealer	40	31	47.44
Investigative (hidden)	6 (15.0%)	1 (3.2%)	31.29
Investigative (available)	10 (25.0%)	9 (29.0%)	55.95
Accomplishment	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.5%)	25.00
Other enterprise	24 (60.0%)	19 (61.3%)	47.35
Columbus Dispatch	16	32	37.61
Investigative (hidden)	1 (6.3%)	3 (9.4%)	27.00
Investigative (available)	6 (37.5%)	3 (9.4%)	42.00
Accomplishment	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.1%)	19.00
Other enterprise	9 (56.2%)	25 (78.1%)	38.24
Dayton Daily News	34	56	44.57
Investigative (hidden)	1 (2.9%)	3 (5.4%)	31.50
Investigative (available)	1 (2.9%)	11 (19.6%)	50.25
Accomplishment	0 (0.0%)	5 (8.9%)	36.60
Other enterprise	32 (94.1%)	37 (66.1%)	42.57
Toledo Blade	12	17	43.48
Investigative (hidden)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	16.50
Investigative (available)	1 (8.3%)	1 (5.9%)	52.50
Accomplishment	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	. . .
Other enterprise	9 (75.0%)	16 (94.1%)	44.92
Total Enterprise stories	144	214	47.04
Investigative (hidden)	14 (9.7%)	16 (7.5%)	30.93
Investigative (available)	23 (16.0%)	34 (15.9%)	55.16
Accomplishment	0 (0.0%)	11 (5.1%)	27.45
Other enterprise	107 (74.3%)	153 (71.5%)	47.94

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Table 2 Enterprise and investigative stories published in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Columbus Dispatch*, *Dayton Daily News*, and *Toledo Blade* in March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995

	All Enterprise[A] Stories		All Investigative[B] Stories		Non-Investigative[C] Enterprise Stories	
	1980	1995	1980	1995	1980	1995
Akron Beacon Journal	31	39	6	8	25	31
Cincinnati Enquirer	11	39	3	11	8	25
Cleveland Plain Dealer	40	31	16	10	24	19
Columbus Dispatch	16	32	7	6	9	25
Dayton Daily News	34	56	2	14	32	37
Toledo Blade	12	17	3	1	9	16
Total	144	214	37	50	107	153

[A] $X^2=22.32$, df=5, $p<.001$

[b] Not significant; more than 20% of cells with frequency under 5.

[c] $X^2=12.09$, df=5, $p<.05$

Table 3 Stories, paragraphs, and graphic treatments by type of enterprise story published in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Columbus Dispatch*, *Dayton Daily News*, and *Toledo Blade* during March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995

	1980			1995		
Type of story	Stories	Graphs[a]	Art	Stories	Graphs[a]	Art
Enterprise stories	144	5177	35	214	11533	64
Investigative (hidden)	14	475	14	16	453	8
Investigative (avail.)	23	989	21	34	2096	48
Accomplishment	0	0	0	11	302	8
Other enterprise	107	3713	. . .	153	8682	. . .

[a] $X^2=184.927$, df=2, $p<.001$ (after removing accomplishment stories from table)

Table 4 Status of target of investigative and accomplishment stories published in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Columbus Dispatch*, *Dayton Daily News*, and *Toledo Blade* during March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995

	1980	1995
Public		
Institution	17 (45.9%)	38 (61.3%)
Person	6 (16.2%)	13 (21.0%)
Private		
Institution	4 (10.8%)	8 (12.9%)
Person	2 (5.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Tax-exempt		
Institution	1 (2.7%)	1 (1.6%)
Person	6 (16.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Other focus	1 (2.7%)	2 (3.2%)
Total	37 (100%)	62 (100%)

$X^2=10.002$, df=2, $p<.01$ (after excluding "Other Focus" and collapsing "Institution" and "Person" categories)

Table 5 **Investigative focus of investigative and accomplishment stories published in the *Akron Beacon Journal, Cincinnati Enquirer, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Columbus Dispatch, Dayton Daily News,* and *Toledo Blade* during March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995 in rank order**

	1980	1995
Local public institution	13 (1)	15 (2)
Head of tax-exempt institution	5 (2)	0 (12)
Business or corporation	4 (3.5)	3 (6.5)
Public figure or official	4 (3.5)	10 (3)
State public institution	3 (5)	17 (1)
Business or corporate executive	2 (6.5)	0 (12)
Public employee	2 (6.5)	3 (6.5)
Tax-exempt institution	1 (9.5)	1 (10)
Employee of tax-exempt institution	1 (9.5)	0 (12)
Federal public institution	1 (9.5)	3 (6.5)
Other focus	1 (9.5)	2 (9)
Entire industry	0 (12.5)	5 (4)
Group of public institutions	0 (12.5)	3 (6.5)
Total	37	62

Spearman's rho = 0.23

Table 6 **Investigative or information-gathering techniques employed in the investigative stories published in the *Akron Beacon Journal, Cincinnati Enquirer, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Columbus Dispatch, Dayton Daily News,* and *Toledo Blade* during March, April, and November of 1980 and 1995 in rank order**

	1980	1995
Documents provided on request	44 (1)	70 (2)
Personal interviews	36 (2)	96 (1)
Unidentified sources	14 (3)	17 (4.5)
Library or published materials	11 (4)	17 (4.5)
Expert used for analysis	10 (5)	22 (3)
Documents leaked	6 (6)	10 (7)
Surveillance	2 (7.5)	6 (8)
Whistleblower as source	2 (7.5)	2 (9)
Failure to identify (undercover)	0 (9.5)	1 (10)
Computer-aided reporting	0 (9.5)	13 (6)
Total	125	254

Spearman's rho = 0.98

Newspaper

THE GREAT HOME RUN RACE OF 1998 IN BLACK AND WHITE

By

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The Great Home Run Race of 1998 in Black and White

In the beginning, there was not a sports writer anywhere who could have predicted how momentous the 1998 major league baseball season would turn out. In the baby days of April, none could imagine the heady rush of July, August, and ultimately amazing September and the fall of Roger Maris' single season home run record. So, when Mark McGwire, the St. Louis Cardinals' home run king of previous years, and Sammy Sosa, the Chicago Cubs' $10 million man, and, for awhile, Seattle Mariners' slugger Ken Griffey Jr., began their siege on Maris' coveted mark of 61 homers, sports writers didn't know how to react. Almost bewildered, they found themselves charting territory they could not have imagined in their wildest dreams. It was a season played out on a field of dreams in a brave new world.

Before the baseball summer drew to a close – with McGwire setting a new record of 70 home runs and Sosa coming in a close second with 66 – many of those same sports writers would note that Maris in 1961 had sometimes been seen as something of a sacrilegious usurper of the almost sacred Babe Ruth record of 60 home runs set way back in 1927. Many wanted Maris' New York Yankees teammate, the venerable Mickey Mantle, to break the hallowed record.

> That season, both were poised to break Babe Ruth's record of 60 home runs, but some fans and some media didn't want Maris to do it.
>
> Mantle – who ended up with 54 homers – was considered a better hitter, but he was also flashier, more outgoing and more popular than Maris, who was reserved, even square.
>
> In fact, Maris was actually booed as he inched closer to the 60-homer mark.[1]

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[1] Donovan Vincent, "Image and Race Affect Fans' Views of Homer Battle," the *Toronto Star* (September 19, 1998): Sports.

Even though he didn't set a new record, in an odd irony Sammy Sosa became the Roger Maris of 1998. For example, late in the season, Charles Krauthammer argued in his nationally syndicated column that McGwire had "earned the right to sit at the throne of Babe Ruth."[2]

> Until this year, no one had heard of Sosa. … Sosa, as a home run hitter, is a one-year wonder. In that way he resembles Roger Maris. Apart from his magical 61 in 1961, Maris never led the league in homers. He never hit more than 39. He was never a year-in, year-out slugger like Ruth or McGwire or, for that matter, Mickey Mantle, Maris' rival for popular affection in 1961.
>
> Mantle then, like McGwire today, was the popular favorite not just because of his winning public persona … but because he had been hitting home Runs forever. Mantle ended up with 536, almost twice Maris' 275.[3]

Of Race and Men

Despite the glory pounded off the bats of McGwire and Sosa in 1998, the story would also be tarnished, but this time by a different brush. Krauthammer and other writers found themselves arguing against the notion that race – the one problem that more than any has dogged America since its earliest days – had once again raised its troubling head. McGwire, often described as Paul Bunyanesque, is white, a big, strapping man with a red goatee, blue eyes, and powerful arms and thighs. Sosa, a relatively small man from the Dominican Republic who speaks broken English with a heavy accent, is a dark-skinned player who would generally be considered black. In contrast, as Krauthammer and virtually everyone else have observed, in 1961 both Maris and Mantle were white.

This paper examines coverage of the home run race in the black newspapers and the mainstream press during July, August, and September. Based on conversations with newspaper readers around the country, the author hypothesized that the media generally favored McGwire over Sosa. A second hypothesis was that the black press would show a bias toward Sosa.

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[2] Charles Krauthammer, "Goodwill from McGwire and Sosa Eclipses Racial Rumblings," McClatchy Newspapers, Inc., (September 15, 1998).
[3] Op.cit.

Most black papers are weeklies, and it was quickly determined that a quantitative content analysis of their pages vis-à-vis big-city dailies would serve no legitimate purpose. Such a task would clearly be comparing apples and oranges. Even the black "daily" *Chicago Defender* publishes on six, not seven, days a week. The two presses, black and mainstream, also show a remarkable dissimilarity in the size of their news holes. Sports sections in mainstream papers such as the *Chicago Tribune* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* often contain more column inches than many of the black newspapers in their entirety.

Location poses another problem. Because Sosa plays for the Chicago Cubs, it was likely that the press in that city would treat him more favorably than McGwire. The same would probably be true for McGwire in the St. Louis press. Additionally, most of the black papers in Chicago and St. Louis either don't cover sports or do so only sporadically. On the other hand, the mainstream press covered the race on a daily basis, publishing more and more home run stories and columns as the season progressed. Many were routine accounts of games that happened to contain the names of the home run hitters. Others were pure opinion pieces. Obviously, it is impossible to compare opinion with straight news stories. It was determined that the best way to compare coverage would be a general qualitative study of the mainstream press and the black newspapers in the two cities. Because wire services and chain ownership of newspapers often permit the publication of stories nationwide, articles from around the country are included. This provides a clearer overall perspective of the picture painted by American newspapers.

Broadcast and Internet coverage of the race was not considered. Radio, television, cable, and Internet coverage, obviously, would make ideal foci for further study.

It was early in the 1998 season when sports writers first realized that Maris' record was under siege on two fronts. But the conventional wisdom then was that the double-edged assault was the work of McGwire and Griffey, another established slugger and an African American. Indeed, in the early months of the season, Sosa was rarely mentioned as a contender. But as the temperature soared and the summer days grew long and then began to shorten, the slight Dominican relentlessly hammered his way onto the sports pages. He could no longer be ignored. Perhaps even by the midsummer All Star Game in July, but certainly by mid-August, the contest was clearly one between the Cardinal and the Cub. But the news coverage remained focused on McGwire, the media darling. Into the fall, despite the more than obvious fact that Sosa was maintaining a home run pace ahead of Maris' 1961 performance, he was generally treated as something of an asterisk to McGwire. But before the season came to a close, this bias shown by sports writers had become a common topic of discussion that soon made its way to the general news pages. Nagging questions kept popping up. Why was McGwire getting so much attention and Sosa so little? Could it be race? Or was something else at play here?

In fact, despite what it may have seemed, the distinction was never as clear as black and white. In addition to race and the remarkably different physiques and visages of the two contenders, there was the very valid question of their past home run achievements. Moreover, in African-American circles, another question arose: Is the Dominican Republic's Sosa really *one of us?* Ironically, it may have been the same question many white sports writers were asking.

The *New York Times* set out on a nationwide trek in September to find out what people were thinking. "Who are you rooting for in the home run race?" reporter Bill Dedman would ask. "Why?"[4]

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[4] Bill Dedman, "It's a Race for the Record, but Is It Also About Race?"

> The answers are not so simple. It does not take long for the vexing issues of race and national origin to creep onto the field. In Atlanta or Boston, in Houston or Miami, awkward pauses and disagreements renew the long, uncomfortable relationship between the national pastime and the national enigma....
>
> If it is a matter of pride for Latinos to root for Sosa, why would many consider it racist for whites to root for McGwire because he is white? And how precise are the racial labels anyway? Which group may claim Sosa as a hero?...
>
> For those who are picking a champion, race often seems to play a role. Latinos, whites and blacks speak of choosing "one of our own" or "someone like us."[5]

Krauthammer used Griffey to underscore his contention that race was not a factor. "And if Sosa had so little public support because of his race, why were so many people pulling for Ken Griffey Jr. until he went into a home run stall in August?" he asked. "Answer: Because Griffey too has a track record as a great home run hitter. He might even break [Henry] Aaron's career mark of 755. Griffey is approaching 350 and he's not even 30 years old."[6]

Citing Michael Jordan as one obvious example, Vincent, too, noted that blacks are often extremely well received by sports fans and sports writers. "In baseball," he added, "a good example is the fan adulation Seattle Mariner hitter Ken Griffey Jr. receives. But unlike Griffey, Sosa has less facility with the English language, and therefore seems more 'ethnic' and conforms less to the American ideal."[7] He was referring to an analysis by Jack Haas, a sociologist at McMaster University, who had described the home run race coverage as "a very complicated issue."[8]

New York Times columnist Harvey Araton also considered Maris' standing vis-à-vis Ruth and Mantle – and the Griffey factor – in summarizing the issue. "Maris beat Babe Ruth's 34-year record of 60 home runs in 1961, but the Ruth legend only deepened its mythic footing because his spikes were firmly planted in the American dream rags to home runs to riches," he wrote during the second week of August. "Now at the far end of the 20th century, in a country with still-painful racial wounds, we have a white man, a black man and a Hispanic man in this contest of Men Chasing Maris. If Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa remain on pace, if Ken Griffey Jr. can get hot again in the next couple of weeks, then … September will be a month to remember, the fitting conclusion to a season when baseball has moved to reclaim its place as the American game of the people."[9]

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[5] Op.cit.
[6] Krauthammer, Op.cit.
[7] Vincent, op.cit.

A few days after the *Times'* column appeared, the *Miami Herald*'s Mike Phillips honed in, saying that Griffey, "the American League's leader with 42 homers, has faded from the chase. His homer Saturday was his first this month."[10] Meanwhile, he observed, Sosa was beginning to have fun:

> Perhaps one reason Sosa is so at ease with the attention is that he was a late arrival to the chase. McGwire and Griffey both got off to quick starts, and talk of breaking the record was brimming for them by the end of April. Sosa has hit 33 of his homers since June 1.
>
> 'This is unchartered ground for Sammy,' says Cubs first baseman Mark Grace. 'McGwire and Griffey have been through this before. McGwire had 58 home runs last season, Griffey 56. When they take their first step on the field in spring training they are bombarded with it – "Are you going for Maris' record?" This is the first time Sammy has gone through it.'[11]

Nonetheless, while 1998 may have marked a first for Sosa as a major home run hitter, that does not explain the continued lack of media attention in August and early September. By then it was clear that he was well within range of matching Maris. Noting the lack of web pages devoted to Sosa – unlike McGwire and Griffey – the *Chicago Sun-Times* on Sept. 7 observed

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[8] Jack Haas, quoted by Vincent, op.cit.

[9] Harvey Araton, "Sports of the Times; Why three Is Better Than One," *The New York Times* (August 13, 1998): C1.

[10] Mike Phillips, "Sosa's homers: a poke and a smile. Unlike McGwire, Griffey, he's enjoying chase," the *Miami Herald* (August 18, 1998).

[11] Phillips, op.cit.

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that despite his run at the record, "Sosa appears to lack the following of his competitors, Mark McGwire and Ken Griffey Jr."[12] It would quickly become a common observation.

The Josh Gibson factor

Sammy Sosa and Roger Maris are not the only baseball players who have found themselves waiting in the wings and wanting for attention. Because of the slugging contest between McGwire and Sosa, September 1998 witnessed the publication of a spate of articles about Josh Gibson, the "Babe Ruth of the Negro Leagues"[13] and probably the greatest home run hitter ever. The *Chicago Defender,* the African-American daily, led the way, noting in an article teased on page 1 that Sosa and McGwire might be fighting to see who would become No. 2 – not the all-time single-season home run king.

In 1936, playing in the Negro National League, Gibson reportedly walloped an astounding 84 home runs. "While the Hall of Fame does acknowledge that Gibson did hit those 84 homers in '36, it's not considered an official Major League mark as are the rest of the records of the Negro Leagues," the *Defender* said. Hall of Fame officials attribute the apparent discrepancy to a lack of official scorekeepers in Negro Leagues games and the lack of newspaper coverage: White papers ignored the Negro Leagues while the black press generally did not cover road games.[14]

The *Chicago Sun-Times* followed a few days later with a first-person column by Mary A. Mitchell, who said she would like to know "who really is the home run king."[15]

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[12] Elliott Harris, "Web world; Sosa seems short-sited," the *Chicago Sun-Times* (September 7, 1998): 77.

[13] Larry Gross, "Gibson, true homer champ?" the *Chicago Defender* (September 17, 1998): 28.

[14] Op.cit. See also, Norma Martin, "It's the greatest home-run record you never heard about," Cox News Service (September 28, 1998).

[15] Mary A. Mitchell, "Mac, Sammy no match for these home run kings," the *Chicago Sun-Times* (September 20, 1998): 22.

"Not to take anything away from Sosa or McGwire," Mitchell said, "but 64 is a long way from the number of home runs Gibson is said to have hit in a single season. Some say Gibson hit as many as 84 home runs; others put the number as low as 69. Either way, Gibson had a tremendous gift that was disregarded because of his color."[16]

According to Todd Holcomb, writing for the Cox News Service, "the slugging catcher hit 962 home runs in a 17-year Negro League career that spanned the Depression and World War II. It is said that Gibson hit 75 homers as a 19-year-old for the Homestead Grays in 1931, and he struck his all-time high, 84, for the Pittsburgh Crawfords in 1936."[17]

"With black and white leagues firmly segregated," Norma Martin wrote a few days later, "the nation's large daily newspapers – run by whites – ignored the Negro Leagues. The black-run press, mostly weeklies, covered the black major-league teams, but the papers were hampered by publishing delays and inconsistencies in reporting the essential information: box scores. As a result, statistics for black teams and their players are not irrefutable."[18]

Gibson was 35 when he died in January, 1947, just a few months before Jackie Robinson would become the first African American to play in major league baseball. Gibson was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1972, the second Negro Leagues player – after the legendary Satchel Paige – so honored.

Statistics, Polls, and Speculation

Some critics contended that the major papers and their readers ignored Sosa, much as Gibson and the Negro Leagues were ignored, because he was vying with a white man. Toward the end of the 1998 season, stories placing Sosa "in McGwire's shadow" had become almost routine.[19] Dan O'Neill of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* recognized the general attitude toward Sosa and the home run race, opening a Sept. 1 story by saying, "Whether America wants to believe it, whether he wants to believe it, Dominican-born Sammy Sosa is playing a historic game of home run derby with Mark McGwire – and he's tied for the lead."[20]

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[16] Op.cit.

[17] Todd Holcomb, "Forgotten slugger," Cox News Service (September 24, 1998).

That same article noted that Sosa had ripped 46 homers since May 25, during which time McGwire batted 31. "Still, despite his remarkable run, Sosa trails McGwire by a tape-measure distance when it comes to name recognition. A national publication recently showed 73 percent of people polled are hoping McGwire breaks Roger Maris' 1961 single-season record of 61 homers first. Only 16 percent are wanting Sosa gets there first, while one percent had no preference."[21]

A national poll conducted later by the *Washington Post* indicated that 48 percent of those surveyed after McGwire hit home run No. 62 were "rooting for him to keep the single-season home-run title he snatched from Roger Maris this week, compared with 18 percent who are cheering for Sosa, who is only three blasts behind."[22] The poll also found, however, that McGwire's fans included a substantial number of African Americans. "But perhaps most intriguing is the way fan loyalty breaks down: While 52 percent of whites support McGwire's bid – with 16 percent backing Sosa – 35 percent of blacks say they too are rooting for the redhead, with 19 percent backing his newfound Latin friend."[23]

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[18] Norma Martin, op.cit.

[19] See, for example, "Sosa, in McGwire's shadow, picks up a shadow," the *New York Times* (September 9, 1998): D2, and "Sammy Sosa, baseball player Sammy Sosa hits his 63rd home run," *U.S. News & World Report* 125 (September 28, 1998): 12.

[20] Dan O'Neill, "Sosa Rips No. 55 to Catch McGwire in Home-Run Race; His Blast helps Cubs Overcome Deficit and Defeat Reds 5-4," the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (September 1, 1998): C1.

[21] Op.cit.

[22] Kevin Merida, "Ballplayers for All America; Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa Rise Above Race," the *Washington Post* (September 12, 1998): E1.

[23] Op.cit.

"Perhaps we are seeing a sense of national identity coming out more than a sense of racial identity," University of Memphis sports sociologist David L. Andrews told the *Post*. "Why should we find it a surprise when African Americans find some pride in their national culture?"[24]

Nonetheless, Andrews said, prior media coverage of the home run race and its combatants may have been reflected in the *Post* poll. "The popular media had already positioned McGwire as the winner and positioned Sosa in the role of almost a faithful underling," he said.[25]

North of the border in Canada, roles were inexplicably reversed. The *Toronto Star* conducted a poll in mid-September in which 465 readers responded to the question: "Who do you hope will win the home run race: Sammy Sosa or Mark McGwire?" A resounding 91 percent chose Sosa versus 9 percent for McGwire.[26] Meanwhile, a USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll conducted Sept. 14 and 15 – while both men shared the home run record at 62 – found that of 1,082 Americans who were asked the same question the *Star* posed, 38 percent chose McGwire, 23 percent favored Sosa, and 36 percent said they'd be happy with a tie or either athlete coming out on top. Three percent had no opinion.[27]

The Atlanta *Journal and Constitution* was one of several publications that took note of Henry Aaron's comments Sept. 17 on ESPN about a *USA Today* survey that indicated 75 percent hoped McGwire would be the one to break the record. "It's just absolutely ridiculous that you could have that lopsided an opinion about who should break the record," Aaron said. "And I've seen little other things that happened that make me believe that McGwire was the favorite rather than Sosa. And I think the reason for that is because he's from the Dominican and also happens to have black skin."[28]

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[24] Op.cit.
[25] Op.cit.
[26] Vincent, op.cit
[27] Op.cit.

Typical of the home run coverage Aaron alluded to was a lengthy article published in the Fort Lauderdale, Florida, *Sun-Sentinel* on Sept. 4, after McGwire hit his 59th home run. The article, which barely mentioned Sosa, was headlined, "Momentous Nights; Fortunate Fans Share Limelight of Mark McGwire's Historic March." The body of the story contained the then-dubious proclamation, "Nobody debates that McGwire is the most amazing home run hitter since Babe Ruth."[29]

On Sept. 11, the *Detroit News* wrote about the "Mark McGwire fever gripping the nation" and "Sammy Sosa, who is chasing McGwire."[30] On Sept. 15, another *News* writer quoted Bishop Ezetrick Wilson, pastor of the New Mt. Moriah Whole Truth Gospel of Faith: "Sosa hasn't been as promoted as McGwire," the Detroit clergyman said. "I assure you, if Sosa comes out ahead, the language will be muffled."[31] All across the country, blacks, browns, and even some whites were making similar predictions. McMaster University's Haas told the *Toronto Star* that the fascination with McGwire in the United States stems from "the white, all-American 'Paul Bunyan' image that McGwire represents. Sosa, a black Dominican, is from a minority group, and when the contest is about the home run – one of the ultimate athletic symbols of power – the McGwire-Sosa race carries that much more meaning."[32]

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[28] Prentis Rogers, "Aaron sees racial bias in McGwire-Sosa chase," the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (September 18, 1998): 2D.

[29] Michael Mayo, "Momentous Nights; Fortunate Fans Share Limelight of Mark McGwire's Historic March," Fort Lauderdale, Florida, *Sun-Sentinel* (September 4, 1998): 1C.

[30] Becky Yerak, "Cardinals gear is hot, retailers say," the *Detroit News* (September 11, 1998): B1.

[31] Lynn Henning, "Sosa suddenly grabs spotlight: Baseball caught off guard as Cubs star catches McGwire," the *Detroit News* (September 15, 1998): C1.

[32] Vincent, op.cit.

"White America was looking for a white sports hero and Mark McGwire was that person," Richard Lapchick, director of the Centre for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University in Boston, told *USA Today* in mid-September.[33]

A few weeks earlier, a day after Sosa ripped home runs 50 and 51 in a game against the Houston Astros, a *Chicago Tribune* baseball writer named Phil Rogers questioned whether his hometown star had been handed the home runs on a silver platter by Astros' pitcher Jose Lima, another of the many Dominican Republic players in the major leagues. Without a shred of evidence but with quite a bit of apparent malice, Rogers speculated:

> When Lima served up home runs No. 50 and 51 to Sosa, it brought to light the split allegiance of the Houston Astros right-hander. More to the point: With his team leading 13-2 in the eighth inning, did he groove the 1-0 fastball that Sosa lifted into the breeze for the cheapest of home runs? ... As McGwire and Sosa move closer to Maris, it is a given that some Dominican pitchers will find themselves facing both of the sluggers. Will they be more careful pitching to McGwire than Sosa?[34]

NewsWatch Project, a Web site emanating from San Francisco State University, described Rogers' comments as sickening:

> If that passage made you want to vomit, you're not alone. People of color have heard such questions too often before. Did Rogers ask whether white pitchers pitch tougher to Sosa because they'd rather see a white man break the record? Rogers' sole evidence for questioning Sosa's two home runs off Lima was based entirely on the players' ethnicity.
>
> At the very least, Rogers is guilty of irresponsible journalism for posing a question that is based on a racist premise. His question is the same as accusing all Italians of being in the mob or justifying rounding up U.S. citizens of Japanese descent during World War II.[35]

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[33] Quoted by Vincent in the *Toronto Star*, op.cit.

[34] Phil Rogers, "Friendly fire: Lima's HR pitches to Sosa raise questions," *Chicago Tribune* (August 24, 1998).

[35] Joseph Torres, *Hispanic Link Weekly Report* (October 27, 1998), A project of the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism, San Francisco State University Journalism Department.

Perhaps because so much of the earlier coverage was slanted toward McGwire, by late September the tide began to turn. At the end of the month, Sosa was even featured in a short but very favorable *People Weekly* biography titled “Sam I am.”[36] In informal Internet surveys on CNN and ESPN Web sites, Sosa topped McGwire by anywhere from six to 10 percent when the question was posed: “Who do you want to see win the home run race?”[37] And in a sports column in the *Dallas Morning News*, Blackie Sherrod confided, “Hunch here is if you conducted a secret poll of every major league pressbox in the land, Sosa would be the popular choice over Mark McGwire.”[38] Sherrod, one of several sports writers who scoffed at the notion that mainstream reporters had injected race into their coverage by subconsciously cheering for McGwire, failed to say why his press box poll would have to be conducted in secret.

The Big 62

On Sept. 8, McGwire slammed home run No. 62 and broke Maris’ record. Sosa did the same thing on Sept. 13. Coverage of the McGwire home run was deafening – as it should have been. The home run statistic is, after all, the most hallowed of American sports records. The Cardinals were playing the Cubs that day, and Sosa ran in from the outfield to join in his friend McGwire’s joyous celebration. The stupendous image of him and McGwire wrapped in a giddy hug made front pages nationwide. In comparison, however, the coverage by the press and major league baseball five days later was almost routine and mute. A *Chicago Tribune* article reprinted in the Raleigh *News & Observer* and other papers around the country summarized the event as follows:

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[36] Richard Jerome, “Sam I Am,” *People Weekly* 50 (September 28, 1998): 115.
[37] Barb Vorwalske, “Don’t Turn Triumph Into Racial Issue,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, letter (October 8).
[38] Blackie Sherrod, “Some hither, others yon…,” the *Dallas Morning News* (September 27, 1998): 2B.

> Everybody's playing catch-up ball when it comes to recognizing Sosa's achievements. When he blasted his 61st and 62nd home runs Sunday against Milwaukee, the message seemed to be that McGwire makes history and Sosa is history, or at most, a mere footnote….
>
> When McGwire was preparing to pass Maris, baseball officials took over media arrangements, issuing more than 700 credentials for the Cubs-Cardinals game when McGwire hit his 62nd. When Sosa hit his, there were perhaps 50 media members in the press box.[39]

Those 700 credentialed reporters present when McGwire swatted his record-breaker assured that the coverage would be total, not just in newspapers, but in all the news media. Local reporters, not privileged enough to have been included among the 700, picked up on the McGwire celebration. Regular television programming was interrupted from coast to coast for the party. Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig and the children of the late Roger Maris were on hand as a McGwire mural was unfurled in center field. That same evening, President Bill Clinton was on the phone with McGwire, praising the slugger for his achievement. McGwire was presented with baseball's Historic Achievement Award. Even the baseballs he had been pitched had been specially coded so the record ball could be authenticated.

As noted above, the reaction to Sosa's Sept. 13 blast was comparatively subdued. Players and fans staged a wild 10-minute celebration, but neither the Marises nor Selig were on hand, although both telephoned congratulatory calls after the game. The lack of official fanfare prompted *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Dave Van Dyck to ask if the silence was evidence of neglect on the part of Selig's office, and, if so, was Sosa's ethnicity a factor?[40] The Cubs had already planned an official party to honor Sosa at Wrigley Field – but that wouldn't happen until a week later. President Clinton didn't call until the following day.[41]

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[39] Rick Morrissey, "Sosa plays 2nd fiddle in chase," the (Raleigh) *News & Observer* (September 15, 1998):C1.

[40] Dave Van Dyck, column, the *Chicago Sun-Times* (September 14, 1998).

[41] Op.cit.

"The way it happened to Sosa was quite different from the way it happened to McGwire, whose record-breaking blast on Sept. 8 was a continent-wide spectacle," *Maclean's* noticed. "By contrast, the Cubs game on Sept. 13 was not carried on national TV, nor was Chicago's venerable Wrigley field packed with dignitaries."[42]

The *Detroit News* reported on Sept. 15 that "some bruised feelings have surfaced in Chicago – and elsewhere – because of the fuss made last week when Mark McGwire hit his 62nd home run of the season, and the comparative lack of attention Sosa received Sunday when he hit his 61st and 62nd home runs to surpass Roger Maris' old record and tie McGwire for the major-league lead."

Denver Post columnist David Ronquillo opined that "baseball and the national sports media were caught with their equality pants down."[43]

> It was curious to notice that no sooner had Sosa pulled even with Mark McGwire in the home-run race that sportswriters, columnists and commentators were deflecting charges of racism in the treatment of the two achievements. Curious, because the denials were flying even before any accusations were made. Perhaps because the incident was so glaring.[44]

San Francisco State University's NewsWatch Project illustrated day-after coverage of both 62nd home runs by the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* by measuring the number of column inches the three papers devoted to the stories. The *New York Times* gave the McGwire feat 75 column inches, compared with about 40 to Sosa's. The *Los Angeles Times* was more balanced, giving McGwire just over 50 inches and Sosa about

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[42] Maclean Hunter, "The man who would be king," *Maclean's* 111 (September 28, 1998): 63.
[43] David Ronquillo, "Media slighted Sosa," *the Denver Post* (September 18, 1998): B-07.
[44] Op.cit.

45. The *Chronicle* showed the greatest disparity by far. It invested more than 250 column inches in McGwire's home run, while Sosa's received less than 25.[45]

NewsWatch Project also interviewed a sports reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the sports editor of the *Delaware News Journal*, and an executive producer of MSNBC Interactive and former sports writer, about the coverage. The *Chronicle*'s Tony Hayes said his paper did not have reporters in Chicago when Sosa hit his 62nd home run. "Yes, there has been talk in the newsroom about the disparate treatment of McGwire and Sosa," Hayes said. "But the real steam to this story was the race to 62. After McGwire got there first, it would have been overkill to repeat the story and give it the same treatment."[46]

Richard Luna of the *Delaware News Journal* said he noticed "some disparity in the news coverage. My paper deserves some lashes for it. Both of the stories deserved to be treated equally or as close to it as possible.

"But there is something to be said for who got there first," he added. "Yet the two stories were obviously handled differently. My paper is small. We have only one baseball reporter and no columnist, but still we had a reporter at the St. Louis game when McGwire hit number 62."[47]

On the other hand, MSNBC's John Garcia said he has been "very encouraged by how McGwire and Sosa have been covered. You can't just look at the number of inches in these stories. You have to look at the quality. And in general, the balance of the language has been fair. I cannot recall seeing anything racially insensitive out there, unless you count that column in the

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[45] NewsWatch Project Web site (October 27, 1998), a project of the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism, San Francisco State University Journalism Department.

[46] Op.cit

[47] Op.cit.

Chicago Tribune and that wasn't news, it was opinion – people are entitled to their stupidity – but that story wasn't part of a trend."[48]

Garcia is not alone in his views. Hayes, for example, said, "McGwire was leading the race the whole time and that's why he got more coverage."[49] And the *Chicago Tribune*'s Morrissey called Sosa "a victim of bad timing, bad luck and bad planning.... It was clear from the coverage that the record was the thing, not the number. Once McGwire broke Maris' mark, coverage dipped."[50] *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Ron Rapoport noted that the *Boston Globe* was treated to charges of racism the day after Sosa's 62nd home run because it didn't treat the event like it did McGwire's. "But the truth is not so simple," he said. "McGwire got to 62 first the way Neil Armstrong got to the moon first, Charles Lindbergh got to Paris first and Edmund Hillary got to the top of Mt. Everest first."[51]

Other columnists who may share similar views could not bring themselves to be as gracious. John Leo of *U.S. News & World Report*, for example, is apparently unaware that racism is not a creature of political philosophy or bound to it: "A few hard-left columnists seemed sorely disappointed that Sosa said, 'What a great country, America,' instead of 'America is chock-full of racist oppressors,'" Leo wrote in an Oct. 19 column.[52]

As noted above, as the 1998 season drew to a close, sports writers were already busy reexamining their coverage of the unprecedented events that had transpired over the course of the previous five months. This self-examination was fueled in part by complaints from readers. The word on the street, particularly in educated African American circles, was that coverage in the press, including television and radio, had not been fair to Sammy Sosa. The press' self-criticism, then, focused on how its reportage could have been more objective and less biased.

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[48] Op.cit.
[49] Op.cit.
[50] Morrissey, op.cit.
[51] Ron Rapoport, "MVP balloting results could turn real nasty," the *Chicago Sun-Times* (September 16, 1998): 125.
[52] John Leo, "Six things I hated about the current baseball season," *U.S. News & World Report* (October 19, 1998): 16.

Two articles that appeared Oct. 4 were especially revealing and instructive. Citing a *Washington Post* story that found McGwire more marketable than Sosa at a time they were tied with 65 home runs each, Knight-Ridder columnist Leonard Pitts asked the seminal question: "Why do we love Mark better than we love Sammy?" The answer, he and other observers agreed, was that McGwire fits an "all-American image," while Sosa does not.[53]

> Meaning that McGwire is a white guy of Irish ancestry and Sosa a brown man from the Dominican Republic. He's not 'all-American' in ways that have nothing to do with immigration status – could never be 'all-American,' even if he'd been born in Philadelphia on the Fourth of July. In 1776.
>
> As one expert put it, 'It's naïve to say, "Gee, this has nothing to do with race."'[54]

Lorrie Goldstein, writing for the *Toronto Sun*, said, "When given a choice between a white 'hero' and a black one, whites almost always choose whites."[55]

Steroids? So what?

Goldstein was one of several writers who took note of McGwire's use of the over-the-counter hormone booster Androstenedione, a steroid that is legal in major league baseball, but not in the National Football League, the Olympics, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and men's tennis. McGwire, she said, "constantly attracted (outside Chicago) a disproportionate amount of publicity, fan adulation and media hype, even though only Sosa was untainted by steroid use."[56] (Less controversial was both sluggers' use of creatine, an amino acid dietary supplement that increases strength that the International Olympic Committee describes as food.)

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[53] Leonard Pitts, "Who Says It's Not About Race? Why McGwire Beat Sosa Well Before the First Pitch," the Greensboro, N.C. *News & Record* (October 4, 1998): F4.

[54] Op.cit.

[55] Lorrie Goldstein, "A Hero Who Breaks All Colour Barriers, Nelson Mandela Is a Source of Black Pride and a Role Model for Whites," the *Toronto Sun* (October 4, 1998): C3.

Earlier, the *Washington Post* quoted Richard Lapchick, director of the Boston-based Center for the Study of Sport in Society, who said, "I do think if Sammy Sosa was the one who had been discovered to use the [testosterone-producing pill Androstenedione], there might have been a different reaction.... White America is so desperate for a white sports hero that no one was going to let what Mark McGwire is doing be diminished. And I don't think it should be. But if it was Sammy Sosa?"[57]

Some writers tried to downplay questions raised by McGwire's use of the questionable steroid – at least during his most magic moment. The Fort Lauderdale, Florida, *Sun-Sentinel*'s Michael Mayo wrote on Sept. 4, "This isn't the time or place to start asking about Androstenedione, the over-the-counter 'dietary supplement' that McGwire has been taking for more than a year.... But there should be more debate about what he's doing, if these pills are the little extra helpers he needs to get over the edge of history. The baseball apologists seem too eager to excuse him, and everybody seems too caught up in the excitement to question him.... And wouldn't it be interesting, just for comparison's sake, to see how he did without the stuff?"

The Chicago Defender

One major exception to the black press' general lack of coverage of the race was the *Chicago Defender*, which closely followed the home run derby all summer. For that reason, a close examination of its sports pages during July, August, and September is in order. The *Defender* begins its sports coverage on the back page, usually page 28, jumping inside from there. The newspaper welcomed July with inside stories about Sosa and Griffey. The Sosa article, by sports editor Larry Gross, began:

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[56] Op.cit.
[57] Merida, op.cit.

> He was baseball's brightest star in June. Now, Sammy Sosa will wait to see if he will shine at the All-Star Game next week.
>
> Despite a torrid first-half pace which had him with 32 homers going into Tuesday night's game at Wrigley Field against the expansion Arizona Diamondbacks, Sosa finished just sixth in fan voting for starters at the all-star game, set for Tuesday at Coors Field in Denver.
>
> Most likely, however, Sosa will be added to the National League squad....[58]

The UPI story about Griffey, datelined New York, noted that he, too, had 32 home runs as the all-star game approached, but was first in overall fan balloting for the game for the fourth time in his career. "Ken Griffey Jr. may not want any part of the home run hitting contest, but fans still overwhelmingly want the Seattle Mariner to play in next week's All-Star Game in Colorado." [59]

The following day, a photo of Sosa in full swing accompanied stories about his selection to the National League All Star team and highlights of the Chicago-Arizona game. The caption read, "Although he didn't hit another homer, Sammy Sosa had a pair of key hits in the Cubs 6-4 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks Wednesday at Wrigley Field."[60] Two days later, an inside story was headlined, "Sosa named NL Player of Month."[61] And, on July 8, an inside story noted, "AL honors Griffey, [New York Yankees pitcher David] Cone."[62]

Two weeks later, the *Defender* reported that the Cubs had returned to Wrigley Field. The article was accompanied by a photo of the local star in action with the caption, "Sammy Sosa will be looking to continue his homer barrage when the Cubs return home tonight to face the

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[58] Gross, "Cubs' Sosa eyeing all-star berth," the *Chicago Defender* (July 1, 1998): 28.
[59] Op.cit.
[60] "Sosa, Durham all-stars," the *Chicago Defender* (July 2, 1998): 28.
[61] "Sosa named NL Player of Month," the *Chicago Defender* (July 4, 1998): 43.

Montreal Expos."[63] Five days later, a story about a Cubs win over the New York Mets was accompanied by a photo of Sosa at bat, captioned, "Sammy Sosa blasted his 38th homer as the Cubs defeated the Mets 3-1 Sunday at Wrigley Field."[64] A July 28 UPI article, "Griffey, McGwire both on mark for HR record," downplayed Sosa's chances of tying Maris. A photo of Griffey ran alongside the text:

> A Cleveland physicist has computed odds showing that Mark McGuire [sic] of the St. Louis Cardinals almost certainly will break the all-time home run record.
>
> Dr. Robert Brown, a physicist at Case Western Reserve University, predicts McGuire has a 97 percent chance of hitting 62 or more homers, which would break the mark of 61 set in 1961 by the late New York Yankees slugger, Roger Maris.
>
> And he says Ken Griffey of the Seattle Mariners has a 75 percent chance of hitting 62 or more. But either Griffey or McGuire will almost certainly do it, and odds are 99 percent at least one will, Brown predicts. McGuire has 43 homers, and Griffey 40.
>
> Sammy Sosa has 38 homers, but Brown's computer puts his chances of hitting 62 at only 50 percent because of various factors built into his computer model. These include how well each has done against teams they're yet to face, pitchers they're likely to see again, each player's propensity for injuries, illness and handling stress.
>
> It's true, numbers can lie, but trends seldom do, Brown said Thursday. His predictions are based on assumptions based on previous performances, but also that McGuire won't miss more than a week of games due to injury or stress, and that Griffey won't miss more than one contest. Other factors include such variables as average homers per time at bat, and rate of hits per game.[65]

Home run coverage for the month concluded with a photo of Sosa hitting a home run. The caption was headlined, "Hot as Arizona heat," and read, "Cubs outfielder Sammy Sosa gives it all he's got at the plate and on the playing field. Sosa became the first Cub player to hit grand slams in consecutive games after homering in the Tuesday game against Arizona."[66]

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[62] "AL honors Griffey, Cone," the *Chicago Defender* (July 8, 1998): 27.
[63] Gross, "Cubs back at Wrigley," the *Chicago Defender* (July 22, 1998): 28.
[64] The *Chicago Defender* (July 27, 1998): 28.
[65] The *Chicago Defender* (July 28, 1998): 28.
[66] The *Chicago Defender* (July 30, 1998): 28.

The *Defender*'s August coverage began with a photo of Sosa swinging and missing in a game the Cubs lost to the Colorado Rockies.[67] On Aug. 9, a story about the hometown boy's rival was teased on page 1, "McGwire swings for homerun history."[68]

On Aug. 10, the paper ran a photo of Sosa watching McGwire during batting practice.[69] Two days later, another photo of Sosa was captioned, "Cubs slugger Sammy Sosa continues to be the talk of baseball with his homer barrage. Sosa's two homers Monday night tied him for the major league lead with 46."[70] On Aug. 14, a photo of Griffey ran inside. "Junior in town. Ken Griffey Jr. will continue his chase of Roger Maris' home run record when the Seattle Mariners come to Comiskey Park this weekend to play the White Sox."[71] On Aug. 17, another story written by Gross, "Cubs outlast Astros," was accompanied by a photo of Sosa besieged by reporters and fans. However, Sosa wasn't mentioned in the article until the eighth paragraph: "Meanwhile, Sammy Sosa tied Mark McGwire for the major league lead in homers when he slammed his 47th round-tripper of the season in the fourth inning to give the Cubs a 1-0 lead off Astro starter Sean Bergman."[72]

The next day, a preview story headlined "Sluggers collide at Wrigley" featured photos of McGwire and Sosa and told why the two men were so important: "It is Sosa and McGwire who have renewed interest in the game of baseball this season with their long ball exploits. Tied with 47 homers apiece to lead the major leagues, the two have fans wondering if they can indeed break baseball's most treasured mark – 61 homers in a season – set in 1961 by the late Roger Maris of the New York Yankees."[73] The game coverage two days later was headlined "Big Mac attacks. McGwire out homers Sosa, 2-1 as Cards top Cubs."[74] It, too, featured photos of the two men, Sosa hitting his 48th home run and a column-width mug shot of a smiling McGwire. The story began:

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[67] The *Chicago Defender* (August 3, 1998): 28.
[68] "McGwire swings for homerun history," The *Chicago Defender* (August 9, 1998): 1, 28.
[69] The *Chicago Defender* (August 10, 1998): 28.
[70] The *Chicago Defender* (August 12, 1998): 28.
[71] The *Chicago Defender* (August 14, 1998).
[72] Gross, "Cubs outlast Astros," the *Chicago Defender* (August 17, 1998): 28.
[73] Gross, "Sluggers collide at Wrigley," the *Chicago Defender* (August 18, 1998) 28.

> Like two gunfighters in the Old West, Sammy Sosa of the Cubs and Mark McGwire of the St. Louis Cardinals went at each other Wednesday afternoon with their homerun bats blazing.
>
> When the smoke had finally cleared at Wrigley Field, however, it was McGwire who had the most bullets in his gun, drilling two homers to one by Sosa as the Cards pulled out a thrilling 8-6 victory over the Cubs in 10 innings.
>
> With the capacity crowd rising to its feet every time one of them came to bat, Sosa and McGwire gave the 36,689 fans in attendance just what they came to see.[75]

Two Aug. 24 stories were headlined, "McGwire blasts 53rd in Cardinal loss to Pirates,"[76] which ran inside, and "Slammin' Sammy Sosa blasts 50th, 51st homers in Cub loss,"[77] on the back page. Both articles featured photos of the two men hitting home runs. On Aug. 27, the lead sports story was about Sosa's 52nd home run,[78] and on Aug. 31, an account of his 54th was teased with a page 1 photo of the slugger.[79]

September opened with stories and photos of Sosa, who by then had 55 home runs. On Sept. 2, a story titled "No pressure for Sosa" was accompanied by the two home run kings standing on a field in uniform chatting. The caption read, "He may be a few inches shorter in height, but Sammy Sosa (right) stands eye to eye with Mark McGwire in the race to break Roger

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[74] Gross, "Big Mac attacks. McGwire out homers Sosa, 2-1 as Cards top Cubs," the *Chicago Defender* (August 20, 1998): 32.
[75] Op.cit.
[76] "McGwire blasts 53rd in Cardinal loss to Pirates," the *Chicago Defender* (August 24, 1998): 27.
[77] Gross, "Slammin' Sammy. Sosa blasts 50th, 51st homers in Cub loss," the *Chicago Defender* (August 24, 1998): 28.
[78] Gross, "Sosa, [Kerry] Wood deliver," the *Chicago Defender* (August 27, 1998): 28.
[79] "Sosa keeps up home run tear," "Sammy taps Rockies," the *Chicago Defender* (August 31, 1998): 1, 28.

Maris' record of 61 homers in a season."[80] Sept. 3rd's story, "Sammy Hacks 56th. Sosa ties Hack Wilson's team record as Cubs defeat Reds," was accompanied by a now familiar depiction of Sosa blasting a home run.[81] But two days later, a story announced, "Cards' McGwire nearing homer record."[82]

On September 8, the *Defender* teased its home run coverage on page 1: "McGwire ties homerun mark." The big headline on the back page announced, "McGwire blasts 61st," with a subhead that read, "Ties Maris' record as Cards defeat Cubs." The article was accompanied by a photo of McGwire hitting the home run and a mug shot of "Slammin' Sammy Sosa," who then had 58 home runs.[83] The next day featured a wire story about the potential $1 million price tag on McGwire's 62nd home run baseball – even before he hit it. Sosa was not mentioned in the 25-paragraph article. An accompanying *Defender* photo was captioned, ""St. Louis Cardinal slugger Mark McGwire is the talk of the sports world with his record-breaking homers."[84]

On Sept. 9, McGwire made history by blasting home run No. 62. The next day, the *Defender* ran two wire stories accompanied by a 1½-column portrait of the new record holder. It also ran a staff story about the Cubs' game, along with a four-column photo of a Sosa billboard: "Mark McGwire might have stolen the show Tuesday night in St. Louis with his recording-breaking 62nd homer, but here, Sammy Sosa is still 'The man' as this giant billboard on the Edens Expressway proves."[85]

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[80] Gross, "No pressure for Sosa," the *Chicago Defender* (September 2, 1998): 28. See also the *Chicago Defender* (September 1, 1998): 28.

[81] Gross, "Sammy Hacks 56th. Sosa ties Hack Wilson's team record as Cubs defeat Reds," the *Chicago Defender* (September 3, 1998): 28.

[82] "Cards' McGwire nearing homer record," the *Chicago Defender* (September 5, 1998): 28.

[83] Gross, "McGwire blasts 61st. Ties Maris' record as Cards defeat Cubs," the *Chicago Defender* (September 8, 1998): 28. See also page 1.

[84] "Price escalates for record HR," the *Chicago Defender* (September 9, 1998): 28.

[85] "McGwire ball lands in Hall of Fame," the *Chicago Defender* (September 10, 1998): 28.

When Sosa passed Maris, the *Defender* teased the story with a front-page photo titled "Sosa fever" and captioned "Sammy slams 61st, 62nd homer."[86] The back page story was headlined "Sizzling Sammy" and was accompanied by a photo of Sosa at work.[87] The lead story the next day was titled, "A whole new ball game. McGwire, Sosa balls to be specially coded." A photo of Sosa just after he hit home run No. 62 accompanied the article.[88]

The only baseball story on Sept. 16 concerned Griffey's 52nd home run.[89] Most of the remaining coverage for the month focused on Sosa and the Cubs, as the team fought for a playoff berth. A UPI story on Sept. 28 was about McGwire being named Player of the Week by the National League:

> Record setting slugger Mark McGwire ended the greatest single home run-hitting campaign in major league baseball history Monday by being named National League Player of the Week for the period ending Sept. 27. His heroics in the last week helped the Cardinals finish with a 19-7 mark in the month of September.
>
> McGwire, who went on one of his patented binges over the weekend and hit two homers each in games Saturday and Sunday against the Montreal Expos, finished the season with a total of 70. He is four ahead of Sammy Sosa of the Cubs.[90]

Black Weeklies

Besides the *Defender*, Chicago has three black weeklies that the author was able to reach by telephone: the *Crusader*, the *Tri-City Journal*, and the *Westside Journal*. None covered the home run race. St. Louis also has three black weeklies the author was able to contact. The *St. Louis American* news editor, Alvin A. Reid, devoted his Aug. 13-19 column to the race, "Mark

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[86] The *Chicago Defender* (September 14, 1998): 1.
[87] Gross, the *Chicago Defender* (September 14, 1998): 28.
[88] "A whole new ball game. McGwire, Sosa balls to be specially coded," the *Chicago Defender* (September 15, 1998): 28.
[89] "Griffey slams 52nd homer, sets RBI mark," the *Chicago Defender* (September 16, 1998): 28.
[90] "McGwire Player of Week," the *Chicago Defender* (September 29, 1998): 26.

Is Miserable, Sammy Is Smiling."[91] The following week, Reid's column was headlined, "Hot Home Run Chase Heads To Stretch Run."[92] Reid penned two front-page articles when McGwire slammed No. 62. They were accompanied by a color photo of McGwire above the fold as he hit the historic home run. Another page one photo showed the two ball players standing together.[93] The following week, Reid's column focused on Sosa: "I have to admit I sold Sammy Sosa short. Maybe I was so caught up in history that I did not realize that the Chicago Cubs slugger could erase Mark McGwire's lead in the home run race."[94]

When McGwire established the new record, the *American* seemed downright ecstatic. A front page story and two color photos were headlined, "70! A Mark For The Ages."[95]

> Mark McGwire ended the season with five home runs in three games and wrestled the all-time single-season home-run title from a very game Sammy Sosa 70-66. Two homers on Saturday and two more on Sunday added to McGwire's already established legend. His first home run Sunday caused a roar which cost the Rams five yards for delay of game at the Trans World Dome on the other side of downtown.
>
> He left his name alone among Major League Baseball immortals by becoming the only man to reach the 70- home-run plateau.[96]

In the same issue, Reid also devoted his regular sports column to McGwire and the home run race.[97]

The *St. Louis Metro Evening Whirl*, another black weekly that generally reports on crime, teased a page-two story on its front page when the players were tied with 62 home runs: "Sosa's 9th Inning Blast Ties McGwire At 62." The Associated Press story was accompanied by a *St.*

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[91] Alvin A. Reid, "Mark Is Miserable, Sammy Is Smiling," the *St. Louis American* (August 13-19, 1998): B1.
[92] Reid, "Hot Home Run chase Heads To Stretch Run," the *St. Louis American* (August 20-26, 1998): C1.
[93] Reid, "Mark Of Excellence" and "Sosa, McGwire Friendship An International Hit," the *St. Louis American* (September 10-16, 1998): 1.
[94] Reid, "We All Sold Sammy Sosa Short – Shame On Us," the *St. Louis American* (September 17-23, 1998): C9.
[95] Reid, "70! A Mark For The Ages. McGwire Closes Year With A Bang-Bang," the *St. Louis American* (October 1-7, 1998): 1.
[96] Op.cit.

Louis Post-Dispatch photo of Sosa and McGwire kidding around before a game.[98] A week later, the paper ran a brief end-of-season roundup with a photo of McGwire shortly after he hit his 68th home run.[99]

The *St. Louis Metro Sentinel* used half of its front page on Sept. 10 to report on "Sweet No. 62," primarily three color photos of McGwire blasting his record-breaking home run. The photo caption, "Going, Going, Gone!" noted that "Big Mac not only tied the single season record for home runs, but the next day (Tuesday), he broke it by hitting *Number 62*.... Now McGwire enters into the record books with the likes of Babe Ruth and Roger Maris for reaching baseball immortality."[100] The *Sentinel*'s sports page ran five additional photos of home runs 61 and 62.[101] The captions did not mention Sosa.

On Oct. 1, the *Sentinel* ran another photo of McGwire slugging a home run on its front page.[102] Inside, a columnist asked, "Who do you think made the most money off Mark McGwire, other than McGwire?" The answer was the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.[103] The column, accompanied by three photos of McGwire and fans, continued:

> Not only did McGwire break major league baseball records, but he literally brought the races together. Sociologists say that team sports are more binding when it comes to race relations, than any other social gathering or efforts.... During the course of his record breaking home run streak, he had everybody in town, talking about his home runs. Both Blacks and whites flocked to the stadium, in order to see the man that had captured everyone's attention.[104]

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[97] Reid, "Pondering Cards Future As Playoffs Take Stage," the *St. Louis American* (October 1-7, 1998): B1.

[98] Rick Gano, "Sosa's Ninth Inning Blast Ties McGwire At 62," the *St. Louis Metro Evening Whirl* (September 15-22, 1998): 1, 2.

[99] "McGwire Ends Season With 70 Homers; Sosa At 66," the *St. Louis Metro Evening Whirl* (September 29-October 6, 1998): 8.

[100] "Sweet No. 62. Going, Going, Gone!" *St. Louis Metro Sentinel* (September 10, 1998): 1.

[101] "McGwire Hammers Number #61 To Tie Roger Maris Home Run Record," and "McGwire's 4th Inning Homer Breaks Single Season Record," the St. Louis Metro Sentinel (September 10, 1998): 1B.

[102] "One For Records....." the *St. Louis Metro Sentinel* (October 1, 1998): 1.

[103] Samuel Slade, "What You DON'T Know Can Indeed Hurt You," the *St. Louis Metro Sentinel* (October 1, 1998): 5A.

In that same issue, the Sentinel devoted the top half of its sports page to McGwire. Three photos of the ballplayer and one of fans accompanied a story headlined, "I Can't Believe I Did It."[105]

Conclusions

With just a few exceptions, coverage of the 1998 home run race and its two major participants was positive in both the mainstream press and in black newspapers. However, a major void surfaced early on in the mainstream press – McGwire received significantly *more* coverage than Sosa, and not just in St. Louis, his team's hometown. He received more press all across the country. Newspaper coverage of Sosa was just as positive; there was just less of it.

In August, once this negligence was pointed out, many mainstream newspapers began going out of their way to report Sosa's exploits as well as McGwire's. Many sports writers confessed that they had slighted Sosa. By early September, articles abounded that either acknowledged a negligent shortcoming vis-à-vis Sosa or denied its existence. However, regardless of which side may have been right or wrong, toward the end of the season coverage became more balanced and a parity had been reached. The press, commendably, seemed to learn from its mistakes and correct itself. The articles about Josh Gibson's almost superhuman home run accomplishments in the old Negro Leagues lend support to this conclusion.

As the season progressed, it also became more and more clear that the home run race was between McGwire and Sosa, not McGwire and Griffey. That McGwire was an established home run hitter long before 1998 and was therefore the front-runner is a valid argument. Sosa was logically cast in a catch-up position. Except for one 45-minute period, he never led McGwire.

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[104] Op.cit.

[105] "I Can't Believe I Did It," the *St. Louis Sentinel* (October 1, 1998): 1B.

Unfortunately, equally as valid is the contention that Sosa does not fit an all-American profile, and therefore had to wage an uphill battle for recognition and respect. But, while this is disturbing, the reason is not entirely one of race. Sosa's Dominican ethnicity may be even more significant. The positive coverage Griffey received and his solid support among fans supports this conclusion. Nonetheless, as soon as it became apparent that Sosa's performance constituted a serious threat to Maris' record, he deserved coverage that was often withheld. The inescapable conclusion is that the press did not treat him fairly during the first two-thirds of the season.

Writing in the *Houston Chronicle* in late September, psychoanalyst and sports psychologist Tom Ferraro observed that "Sammy Sosa finally made it to the cover of America's leading sports magazine," then asked, "but why did it take 63 home runs to get there?"[106]

> It's dawning on many major sportswriters what the American people have known for a month – that both the reaction to and the coverage of Sammy Sosa's achievements during the 1998 home run race have been largely racist. He is not the media darling with a Paul Bunyanesque persona that Mark McGwire is. Sosa is a dark-skinned Hispanic from the Dominican Republic and as such is stigmatized due to color and nationality. His features and even his cutoff T-shirt are not easily digestible by American TV.
>
> When we read that Bud Selig, the commissioner of baseball, doesn't bother to show up during Sosa's record-breaking game, or that TV executives make no effort to adjust their schedule as they did when McGwire neared Babe Ruth's former record, this says something to our American conscience. The enormous coverage given to McGwire and the relative neglect of Sammy Sosa are not explained by suggesting that McGwire topped roger Maris' record first. The reason Sosa has been ignored and McGwire has been adored is largely because McGwire is Caucasian. To suggest otherwise is merely to rationalize away the obvious.
>
> Racism is an ugly word that explains why most people are in denial on the treatment of Sosa.[107]

Perhaps the final *mea culpa* of the mainstream press came in November when the Baseball Writers Association of America chose Sosa as the National League's Most Valuable

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[106] Tom Ferraro, "No denying the taint of racism in McGwire-Sosa coverage," the *Houston Chronicle* (September 27, 1998): Outlook 4.

Player. Sosa received 30 of 32 first-place votes, which are cast by two writers from each NL city. McGwire received the remaining two.[108]

The often sparse coverage in the black press in St. Louis and Chicago seemed oblivious to race and tended to be slanted toward the hometown favorite. This was to be expected and is easily justifiable. But the *Chicago Defender*, the *St. Louis American*, and the *St. Louis Metro Sentinel* – like some of their mainstream counterparts – deserve special credit for weaving a striking balance of objectivity. The three black papers virtually ignored the racial makeup of the players and focused instead on the profound achievements of McGwire, Sosa, and Griffey. In the end, they are to be commended. That stated, however, it is impossible not to wonder what has happened to the traditional *raison d'être* of the black press, stated so eloquently by the editors of *Freedom's Journal,* the first black newspaper, in 1827: "We wish to plead our own cause."[109] Until recently, that statement served as a mantra for the black press. To their discredit, the black newspapers included in this study made no mention of the biased coverage the home run race received in the first two-thirds of the season. The words of scholars Paula M. Poindexter and Carolyn A. Stroman, writing about another issue, ring clear: "Judging from these newspapers' low key coverage of this important issue, it seems relatively clear that the strong protest stance, once highly evident in black newspapers, is being replaced by a neutral, objective tone. This raises anew the question …: If protest is no longer the major purpose of the Black Press, what is its present-day function?"[110]

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[107] Op.cit.

[108] "Survey says: Sosa for NL MVP," *USA Today* Web site (November 19, 1998).

[109] Samuel Cornish and John B. Russworm, "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal* 1 (March 16, 1827): 1

[110] Paula M. Poindexter and Carolyn a. Stroman, "The Black Press and the Bakke Case," *Journalism Quarterly* 57 (1980): 268.

JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE INFORMATION-GATHERING PROBLEMS

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JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE INFORMATION-GATHERING PROBLEMS

ABSTRACT

This paper reports a study of the leading problems identified in using the World Wide Web for newsgathering. Respondents to 1997 and 1998 national censuses listed their perceptions of flaws in the Web as a newsgathering source. Data from similar national censuses conducted in 1994, 1995, and 1996 are also reported. The study found growing use of the Web and commercial services during all five years. Among the leading problems were verification, unreliable information, badly sourced information, and lack of site credibility. Technical problems were not perceived to be as severe.

JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE INFORMATION-GATHERING PROBLEMS

Since journalists first began to gather and report information from sources centuries ago, they have encountered a variety of obstacles. For example, inaccurate and incomplete information, unreliable sources, deceptive and misleading information providers, and other similar difficulties have caused both major and minor problems in news reporting (Izard, Culbertson & Lambert, 1994; Mencher, 1997; Rich, 1997). The value of these sources to news reporters is also well documented. Columbia University newsgathering expert Melvin Mencher (1997, p. 309) wrote: "The source is the reporter's life blood. Without access to information through the source, the reporter cannot function."

While new technologies, as they develop, help to overcome some of these obstacles, they do not always seem to be the absolute solution. They can, sometimes, add to existing problems or even create new ones. However, journalists have used the telegraph, telephones, short-wave radio, fax machines, and other new information-gathering technologies to improve their work and to resolve some of the difficulties of gathering information that have emerged since the industrial revolution. Technology-based resources, for instance, help increase speed and, sometimes, the accuracy of information being reported. Technologies, of course, have their shortcomings. Sources on the telephone or two-way radio, for instance, may not be who they say they are supposed to be. Human sources have been known to be unreliable, to lie, and even to engage in elaborate hoaxes. New technologies, such as cellular telephones, often provide poor connections and radio communications is susceptible to interference. Furthermore, third parties may monitor wireless devices. Faxes, widely used in newsrooms during the past two decades, can be garbled or reproduced so poorly as to be unreadable (Garrison, 1992; Izard, Culbertson & Lambert, 1994; Mencher, 1997).

The latest information-gathering technology, centered on the worldwide network of computer systems known as the Internet, has become an asset to most journalists who have embraced it. Growing numbers of journalists use the World Wide Web as a reporting tool with considerable enthusiasm (Callahan, 1997; Garrison, 1998; Kaye & Medoff, 1999; Reddick & King, 1997; Ross & Middleberg, 1997). Among the most appealing reasons for use of this resource is its scope and depth of information as well as the speed at which the information may be retrieved. "Before personal computers and fax machines, journalists relied on other tools to do their jobs: telephones, telegraphs and typewriters were at the top of the list.... Add a modem to a computer with a news library researcher skilled in online database searching, and reporters discover information resources unrivaled in scope. With expanded access into electronic files of government data, and by analyzing that data, reporters really become power journalists," wrote University of North Carolina news research authority Barbara Semonche (1993, p. 267).

The value of online resources to journalists is well established in the literature of newsgathering and mass communication technology (Callahan, 1999; Garrison, 1998; Garrison, 1996; Kaye & Medoff, 1999; Kessler & McDonald, 1992; Reddick & King, 1997; Ross & Middleberg, 1997). For example, resources found on the Internet often enhance coverage of breaking news stories such as an airline or weather disaster (Ward & Hansen, 1997). Journalists use online resources for background for interviews or other purposes, to find or identify sources, to check or verify facts, to read their competition, to become informed about current events, and to identify story ideas (Garrison, 1998, Ross & Middleberg, 1997; Ward & Hansen, 1997).

Just as these advantages have been documented, there is growing alarm about the problems associated with use of online resources. When online resources first appeared in newsrooms in the late 1970s and early 1980s, much concern focused on the cost of the services (Garrison, 1995). Contemporary journalists often seek innovative approaches to their newsgathering and news processing and their jobs often require polished analytical skills and overall higher levels of computer literacy (Stepp, 1996). Other concerns focused on learning to use complicated and cumbersome computer systems that were not very user-friendly. While online fees have been reduced, the quality, amount, and depth of information have increased. Furthermore, use of these online resources has become much easier in the past decade. However, other issues remain. One such concern is judging and, ultimately, trusting the quality of the content of online databases, Web sites, and other resources (Schlossberg, 1999). Government databases, for example, are widely known for their errors and flaws (Freed, 1994; Garrison, 1996; Landau, 1994).

Content of the massive amounts of online resources requires critical judgment by journalists. Without critical analysis of World Wide Web and other online content just as journalists evaluate human sources for their credibility and trustworthiness, there will be problems with the online tools (Garrison, 1998, Winter). "It is not all business on the WWW," wrote Cheryl Harris (1996, p. 113), an Internet use researcher. "Plenty of sites share recreational pursuits, personal interests, or just wacky achievements like a hottub that is wired to the WWW and can be monitored by anyone tuning into its WWW site."

While the Internet and World Wide Web are valuable newsgathering tools, finding information is a barrier for all users, especially journalists on deadline (Callahan, 1997). Even if the act of locating information were enough trouble, technophobia has been determined to be another concern (Garrison, 1998, Singer, Tharp & Haruta, 1998, Ward & Hansen, 1997). Some experts have endorsed extensive training on use of online resources as an answer (Garrison, 1996; Kovacs, 1995).

Researchers have identified anonymity and online accountability as major problems with online newsgathering (Singer, 1996). Accuracy and verification issues arise when discussing online news sources such as Web publications that are often themselves sources for journalists (Evans, 1998, Lasica, 1997; McGuire, et al, 1997; Reddick & King, 1997). Some experts warn of a new form of the accuracy problem that is caused by hackers, individuals who intentionally break into and alter a site's content (McGuire, et al, 1997; Phipps, 1998). Still other experts believe verification to be the most serious problem with online information (Carleton, 1994).

The Internet, one author recently noted with some concern, has changed the way Internet users assess trustworthiness. Schlossberg (1999) argued that traditional standards, such as familiar voices or established reputations, are being discarded in favor of technological features, such as availability of useful links to other sites. Authoritativeness of sources on the Web is identified as a factor in using online sources (Evans, 1998; McGuire, et al, 1997). The timeliness, or freshness, of the information offered is a concern of many journalists (McGuire, et al, 1997).

Ethics problems are also the focus of those scholars studying the Web as an information source. Lynch (1998) identified responsibility for linked content and chat room content, content credibility and accuracy, privacy invasion, and separation of advertising and editorial content as key concerns.

Carleton (1994) noted that the fluid nature of the Internet is troublesome because of information found one day may not appear the next. Andrews (1996) said the new technology is to blame for still another problem—surveillance in cyberspace. Reporters using newsgroups and other online resources to find sources, he explained, often are vulnerable to spying by competitors or corporate public relations people.

Pfaffenberger (1996) observed that searching for information on the Internet usually results in finding too much information or finding too little information. There is also need to consider the context of the information presented on the Web (McGuire, et al, 1997). Numerous individuals have written about information overload problems and the need to manage information found using online resources (Garrison, 1998; McGuire, et al, 1997; Pfaffenberger, 1996). With the growth of the Web and other online services in recent years, the problem has only intensified (Glossbrenner, 1998). The resulting proliferation of search tools has only created other problems—such as deciding which search tools to use (Glossbrenner, 1998) and dependency on incomplete databases of search engines (Lawrence & Giles, 1999; Williams, 1999). This is compounded by the dynamic open and unlimited nature of the Web. "The Web community is antiestablishment and skeptical about the status quo. It assumed that information should be free-flowing, unrestrained and open to interpretation—assumptions that thwart the old media's traditional role as gatekeeper and protector of the public's right to know," wrote journalist Dianne Lynch (1998, p. 42).

Considering these numerous concerns about online reporting sources that are discussed in the literature, this exploratory study sought to answer these two research questions:

a. *What are journalists' use levels and usage characteristics of the World Wide Web and other online resources?*

b. *What are the main problems perceived by journalists that are related to their use of information found on the World Wide Web?*

METHODS

During the past five years, annual national censuses of daily newspapers with circulations of 20,000 or greater were conducted. As newspaper circulations changed and as some newspapers ceased to exist or were merged into other newspapers during the period, the membership of the population changed slightly from year to year. Population sizes were 514 newspapers in 1994, 514 in 1995, 510 in 1996, 510 in 1997, and 504 in 1998. Circulation figures used were those listed in the current *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* during 1994-98 (for example, see Anderson, 1998). In each census except 1994, two follow-up mailings were used to enhance response rates. In 1994, only one follow-up mailing was conducted. Response rates were n = 185, or 37.1% (1998), n = 226, 44.3% (1997), n = 233, 45.7% (1996); n = 287, 56.5% (1995); and n = 208, 40.5% (1994). Demographics— circulation, regional proportions, and individual respondent newsroom roles— of respondents and their newspapers have been consistent over the five years. Response patterns represent all regions of the country and have produced a mean circulation each year of about 115,000 copies. In each year, respondents have been editors, computer-assisted reporting supervisors, news researchers, investigative reporters, or special project reporters. Because the study involved analysis of a population, not a sample, statistical tests are not reported.

The results reported in this study were part of a larger study that used a six or eight-page questionnaire, depending on the year. For the most part, closed-ended questions were used on Web problems items and open-ended items were required for Web use items. The series of censuses are part of an on-going project that studies computer-assisted reporting, including use of the World Wide Web as a newsgathering resource. One portion of the data collection instrument focused on use of the World Wide Web and the leading national and regional commercial online information services. Questions sought to establish use of online tools, frequency of use of these resources, types of online resources used, types of news stories reported with online resources, most frequently used online databases or services, most commonly used Web sites, search techniques and tools, and several measures of problems encountered during online research sessions. Specifically, respondents were asked to identify the main problems encountered in using information found on the Web. They were also asked to identify the elements of high- and low-quality Web sites.

FINDINGS

World Wide Web use

The first research question focused on Web use. Data presented in Table 1 indicate steady growth of both the basic use and frequency of use of online resources in newsgathering. General use has increased to 95.1% of responding newspapers, increasing each year from a base of 57.2% in 1994. Daily use of online services has increased to 63.2% of responding newspapers in 1998, up from 27.4% in 1994.

In 1998, a total of 92.4% of responding newspapers used the World Wide Web or other Internet resources in newsgathering. The use of the Internet as the primary online research tool in newsrooms has grown in recent years, as data in Table 2 demonstrate. Only 25.0% of newspapers used the Internet or World Wide Web in 1994, but this percentage has steadily increased since that year. Between other Internet and commercial online services reported, respondents favored using local government online, most likely on the Web in 1998 (54.1%), Nexis-Lexis (36.2%), America Online (35.1%), PACER (28.1%), and Autotrack Plus (27.0%). Data from earlier years show that these resources have consistently been among the leading choices.

Data in Table 3 show that journalists use state and federal government Web sites most often. The general category of state government Web sites was named by 24.4% of respondents in 1998. It was also the leading category in 1997. However, use of the federal U.S. Bureau of the Census site has also increased to 24.4% in 1998. Search tools Yahoo! and AltaVista were also popular. After these top four resources on the Web, selections decrease to much smaller proportions.

World Wide Web problems

The second research question focused analysis on Web problems for newsgathering. In terms of positive attributes of Web sites, journalists named the reputation of the source as the leading characteristic. As noted in Table 4, 80.5% of respondents sought information from sources that were perceived to be reputable Finding valid, accurate information was also viewed to be important (77.8%), as was the ability to search the site for specific information (70.3%). A total of 60.5% sought data that can be transferred from a Web site into an analytic tool such as a spreadsheet program Ease in access to information was also important to journalists (57.8%) Speed, indexing, and the number of graphics on the site were viewed as less important.

Data in Table 5 highlight those factors journalists identified as troublesome with Web sites Inaccurate information (81.6%) was the most frequently cited characteristic of a poor-quality Web site Useless or bad content was also widely cited (70.3%) Bad or outdated links (67 6%) and lack of attribution (61 6%) were also common criticisms

When asked what they believed the most common problems of Web sites for journalists, the respondents listed lack of verification most often (54.1%) Similarly, Table 6 data show unreliable information (44.9%), badly sourced information (44.3%), and lack of site credibility (43.8%) were also important concerns of the respondents.

Journalists described use of their online resources as most helpful in backgrounding stories in 1998 (15.3%), data in Table 7 show. This use of online information was also the leading success in 1997. Other successes in using online resources in newsgathering in 1998 included finding difficult-to-find information (9.2%), finding sources (8.2%), extending government coverage (8.2%), and integrating online research fully into the newsroom (8.2%).

In both 1998 and 1997, journalists reported the inability to take advantage of online research and information gathering as their leading failure involving online services. As shown in Table 7, a total of 30.4% cited this problem in their newsroom, down from 35.1% a year earlier. Lack of access has increased as an identified problem (15.7%), but those listing lack of training have declined slightly (5.9%). Trouble with government data and lack of supervisor support are also listed by 4.9% of respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

The steady growth in use of online services in news reporting underlines the importance of identifying and analyzing problems associated with online information services and the Internet. The clear dominance of the Internet and its World Wide Web as the leading online tool suggests that additional research about its use be conducted. In fact, serious thought should be given to development of a national World Wide Web news and information-gathering research agenda.

The simple fact that more than nine in ten daily newspapers with daily circulations of 20,000 or more participating in this study use the Web points to the need to identify and resolve, as much as possible, the problems that come with using the Web as a newsgathering tool. At the very least, there is urgency in making certain that journalists are aware of these potential problems and ways to cope with them.

Many of the obstacles that journalists have identified in these censuses are common problems of human sources, documents, or personal observation as well. Some of the issues are tied to credibility of the source. At the moment, perhaps, this is one of the leading unknowns involving the Web. Most of the sites used that are not government, or "official" public sites, are still being examined and tested for credibility for use by journalists. Journalists, simply put, are not yet sure which sources are to be trusted for their accuracy and dependability in the world of the Web. They have existing standards for assessing credibility and trustworthiness of sources and these are used with the Web. But there may be need for new standards as well. Development of credibility of a source of information requires time and experience and journalists have not spent much time with the sources used on the Web yet, nor have they gained much experience with those sources in the short time the Web has become an information resource.

While many of the problems identified in this study are of broader concerns than just with the Web, some of them are unique to the online world. Both sets of obstacles need to be addressed as journalists develop a news research culture for the online world. Experienced users, such as news librarians, are acutely aware of the problems and have worked to overcome them by educating others in the newsroom. However, beginning users may not be as aware of the shortcomings. Likely members of this group include both student journalists and veteran professionals who are only just beginning to gain access to the Internet and its resources.

At this stage in the evolution of the Web and in the development of Web researchers in newsrooms, journalists remain concerned about traditional issues in newsgathering. Technical issues, while not ignored, were not as significant. For example, journalists listed source reputation and accuracy of information as leading characteristics of high-quality Web sites. They listed inaccurate information and useless or bad content as leading characteristics of poor-quality sites. For each question, the third-leading characteristic involved technical issues related to the computer network— searchability and outdated links to other sites.

Online successes and failures resulted in interesting contradictions in some ways and may be worth further study. Journalists in this study see success with the Web in terms of news content (for example, backgrounding stories, finding difficult-to-find facts, finding sources, extending government coverage, and fully integrating use of online resources into the newsroom). However, the perceived failures are of a different nature. These are much more institutional in that they focus on the newsroom itself (for example, not taking advantage of it, no access to it, lack of training, and no management support).

Among the most frequently cited problems, journalists pointed to verification, reliability, sourcing, and credibility as the leading factors, not technology. Only difficulty in finding Web addresses was a problem cited that is inherent in the Internet's use. Even when asked about successes and failures, most responses related to finding and using information (e.g., backgrounding) rather than the new technology of the Internet (e.g., training or inadequate hardware-software). Among all responses to these items, the same general pattern held that shows most journalists remain concerned about the quality of the information rather than the quality of the medium itself.

TABLES

TABLE 1
GENERAL USE OF ONLINE RESOURCES

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
USE OF ONLINE					
Yes	57.2%	63.8%	80.7%	89.8%	95.1%
No	39.9	33.4	19.3	7.5	3.2
Missing	2.9	2.8	0.0	2.7	1.6
FREQUENCY OF USE					
Daily, more often	27.4%	28.9%	36.9%	51.8%	63.2%
Weekly, more often	12.1	22.0	25.8	28.8	25.4
Monthly, more often	3.6	9.8	12.9	4.9	2.7
Less than monthly	1.4	5.8	4.3	7.1	3.8
Missing / never used	38.9	33.8	20.2	5.3	4.9
Other	17.3	----	----	----	----
Totals	100.7%	100.3%	100.1%	100.0%	100.0%
	n = 208	n = 287	n = 233	n = 226	n = 185

TABLE 2
USE OF ONLINE NEWSGATHERING RESOURCES

Service	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Internet / WWW	25.0%	44.6%	66.5%	91.6%	92.4%
Local govt. online	-----	27.2	28.3	46.0	54.1
Lexis / Nexis	28.8	28.2	28.8	25.7	36.2
America Online	17.3	38.0	47.2	42.5	35.1
PACER	-----	19.5	23.2	27.4	28.1
Autotrack Plus	-----	-----	-----	20.4	27.0
FedWorld	-----	19.9	20.6	19.9	21.1
Usenet Newsgroups	-----	-----	-----	-----	21.1
Govt. or other BBSs	38.9	18.1	8.2	23.9	21.1
Dow Jones	16.3	12.2	13.3	15.5	20.5
DataTimes	14.9	26.8	24.5	19.9	19.5
Dialog/Know. Index	26.4	22.3	18.5	15.0	16.2
CompuServe	38.0	39.4	41.6	26.5	13.0
Westlaw	0.0	1.7	3.4	3.5	7.6
Information America	-----	3.8	4.7	3.1	3.8
	n = 208	n = 287	n = 233	n = 226	n = 185

TABLE 3
FAVORITE WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

Web site	1997	1998
State government sites	23.9%	24.4%
U.S. Census	17.2	24.4
Yahoo!	11.9	11.4
AltaVista	13.4	8.1
Various newspaper sites	2.2	4.9
Switchboard	3.0	4.1
SEC Edgar	6.0	3.3
Journalism organization sites	0.0	2.4
ProfNet	0.0	1.6
Weather sites	0.0	1.6
Environmental Protection Agency	0.0	1.6
Federal Aviation Administration-NTSB	0.0	1.6
Federal Election Commission	4.5	0.0
FedWorld	2.2	0.0
Lycos	2.2	0.0

(Note: First-listed responses only, n = 123 in 1998 and n = 134 in 1997)

TABLE 4
CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH-QUALITY WEB SITE

Characteristic	1998
Reputable source	80.5%
Valid, accurate information	77.8
Searchable site	70.3
Downloadable, delimited data	60.5
Easily accessible information	57.8
Speed	41.1
Indexed	32.4
Minimum graphics	17.8
Other characteristic	3.8

n= 185

TABLE 5
CHARACTERISTICS OF A LOW-QUALITY WEB SITE

Characteristic	1998
Inaccurate information	81.6%
Useless, bad content	70.3
Bad, outdated links	67.6
No attribution	61.6
Slow to load	53.0
Cannot search site	51.9
Poor site organization	47.0
Pointless graphics	44.3
Public relations content	27.6
URL, site hard to find	26.5
Other characteristic	3.8

n= 185

TABLE 6
COMMON PROBLEMS USING WEB SITES

Problem	1998
No verification	54.1%
Unreliable information	44.9
Badly sourced information	44.3
Lack of site credibility	43.8
URL, site hard to find	24.3
Truthfulness	18.4
Other problem	11.9

n= 185

TABLE 7
ONLINE USE SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Category	1997	1998
SUCCESSES		
Background	12.5%	15.3%
Finding difficult-to-find facts	11.6	9.2
Finding sources	9.8	8.2
Extending government coverage	8.0	8.2
Fully integrated into the newsroom	6.3	8.2
Getting news fast	8.9	6.1
More government data access	2.7	6.1
Big database projects	1.8	5.1
Now part of reporting	5.4	5.1
Reporters getting excited	3.6	5.1
Added depth, context	7.1	4.1
Surveys and statistics	0.9	4.1
FAILURES		
Not taking advantage of online	35.1%	30.4%
Lack of access	5.3	15.7
Not enough training for use	8.8	5.9
Trouble with government data	1.8	4.9
Editors don't support it	1.8	4.9
Slow to learn to use online	8.8	3.9
Need expertise	1.8	3.9
Cannot find information sought	0.9	3.9
No verification	0.0	2.9
Not enough resources to use	8.8	2.0
Some staff members not motivated	5.3	1.0

n = 98 for successes and n = 102 for failures in 1998 and n = 112 for successes and n = 114 for failures in 1997

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Analytical Journalism: Credibility of Computer-Assisted Reporting

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Analytical Journalism: Credibility of Computer-Assisted Reporting

Abstract

An experiment tested readers' perceptions of newspaper stories that used one of three different types of evidence to support the reporter's claims in the stories: data the reporter independently gathered and analyzed via databases (computer-assisted reporting), data from official or expert sources, and anecdotal evidence. Participants read three news stories on different topics with one of the three types of evidence in each story. After reading each story, participants rated the story's credibility, newsworthiness, liking, quality, understanding, and readability. The computer-assisted reporting stories were rated as credible, newsworthy, and understandable as the official and anecdotal stories, but were liked less and were rated poorer in quality than the official stories and were liked less and were rated harder to read than the anecdotal stories. Implications for computer-assisted reported stories are discussed.

Analytical Journalism: Credibility of Computer-Assisted Reporting

It is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully.
It is now necessary to report the truth about the fact.
- Robert Hutchins report on press freedom, 1947

Computer-assisted reporting, or CAR, began some 10 years ago and has been gaining acceptance and momentum ever since. Through database and statistical analysis, good CAR reporters use raw data to support their own conclusions. Many reporters find this development to be ideal—they do not have to be as dependent on official and expert sources, press releases, government statistics, or anecdotal evidence to tell their stories. Now, in addition to such sources, reporters can rely on their own evidence from independent data analysis, allowing them to become more of a participant in the news-making process rather than a mere observer. This new approach is challenging the traditional philosophy of detached, objective journalism. Indeed some scholars believe this transformation is a struggle "about the soul of journalism in the 1990s" (Weinberg, 1996, p.4). If the media in general act as a searchlight on society, then CAR gives the individual reporter a high-powered, hand-held flashlight.

Although these types of data-intense stories might have advantages from a journalist's perspective, very little research has considered the effects this type of story might have on the audience. Using an experimental design, this study sought to measure readers' perceptions of computer-assisted stories, specifically those in which the newspaper reporter independently analyzed data and drew conclusions based on such findings. Will a move away from the traditional objective-style reporting strengthen or weaken the credibility of journalism? In addition, this study will measure participants' story ratings of other outcomes important to journalists: newsworthiness, liking, quality, readability, and understanding of computer-assisted stories.

Supporters of such techniques say that reporters can provide independent, outside viewpoints that are not vested in a particular controversy. Critics, on the other hand, fear that journalism may be overstepping its bounds by advocating a position and discarding traditional objectivity. Thus, while some view such proactive journalism as a means to abate declining newspaper circulation, others suggest abandoning objectivity will further reduce newspaper credibility.

The literature reviewed here will briefly examine the argument of objectivity in reporting and its influence in the development of reporter-generated data. Then, it will address the development of computer-assisted reporting and the issues most commonly discussed in CAR critiques.

Objective Journalism

Most media scholars point to the beginnings of objectivity as a direct reaction to the rampant factionalism of the mid-1800s and the subsequent advent of penny press (Glasser & Ettema, 1989; Glasser, 1992; Miraldi, 1990). Oliver Wendell Holmes popularized the notion of free expression in his 1919 dissenting opinion where he borrowed John Milton's "marketplace of ideas" metaphor (Glasser, 1992). Milton (1951) argued that all sides of an issue must be heard in order to find the truth because falsehoods will be exposed in the "marketplace". Objective reporting, interpreted by publishers and editors as neutral, unbiased reporting, became the norm by the early 1900s (Glasser, 1992).

Specific rules and conventions regarding journalism as a profession arose from the principal of objectivity. Tuchman (1972) described how journalists rely on objectivity as a "strategic ritual" and a defense against criticism (p.661). Tuchman (1978) also found that most news organizations strategically identify centralized sources that are accepted as "appropriate sites at which information should be gathered" (p.211). Similarly, Gans (1979) showed that journalists use a predictable set of criteria in deciding what is news by reporting the facts as gathered from sources of recognized authority. Studying this system of newsgathering and how news content is structured, Schudson (1978) argued that "the process of news gathering itself constructs an image of reality that reinforces official viewpoints" (p.185).

Many scholars have criticized objective journalism because it maintains the status quo and encourages the establishment to dominate the marketplace of ideas (Bennett, 1990; Hallin, 1986). Bennett (1990) argued that, like a strategic ritual, reporters became dependent on government officials and simply presented elite debate in an unqualified, objective manner. Similarly, Hallin (1986) argued that most journalists operate within what he called the "sphere of legitimate controversy" (p.50). In this paradigm, journalists who operate in an objective manner are simply supporting consensus values. In such a culture of objectivity, critics argue that the role of the reporter has been stifled (Glasser, 1992).

Investigative Journalism

The rise of investigative journalism and the growing adversarial press—major challenges to objectivity—began in the 1970s with the Watergate scandal uncovered by *The Washington Post* (Glasser & Ettema, 1989). Miraldi (1989) chronicled one of these attempts by examining a nursing home scandal uncovered by the *New York Times.* Miraldi however, found that the reporter could never directly insert his judgment into stories even if it were based on truth because "objectivity forced him to cloak his opinions behind official sources, when he could find them" (p. 3).

Despite such obstacles to investigative reporters, the popularity of the method has continued to grow. Some say investigative reporting reached a new peak in 1991 when the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published the expose "America: What Went Wrong?" by Barlett and Steele, which tried to explain the economic and social breakdown of the 1980s. Weinberg (1997) believes the work is important not only for its subject matter but also because the authors unapologetically threw aside the shackles of objectivity and drew their own conclusions from their own research. The reporters did not rely on official debate or official sources. Rather, they saw an important story that was not being told and drew their conclusions based upon their investigation of the evidence.

Of course, such a radical departure from objectivity did not come without criticism. Jack Fuller, a Pulitzer Prize winner and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, said that the "marshaling of evidence followed the conviction rather than the conviction arising from the proof" (Weinberg, 1997, p. 9). Weinberg (1997) contended the investigation duo did not begin with a conviction but rather arrived at one through the "relentless presentation of evidence" (p. 10). Whichever came first, the fact remains that Barlett and Steele did inject their own analysis and interpretation of the facts—a direction journalism seems to be heading.

Computer-Assisted Journalism

One of the methods used by Barlett and Steele to document their story was computer-assisted reporting, by analyzing 70 years of income tax data from the IRS. This type of extensive, independent data analysis has opened up new opportunities for investigative reporters (Weinberg, 1997). Instead of focusing on isolated abuses of power and wrong-doing, today's investigative reporters "look for wide-ranging failures of public policy, government neglect, corporate scheming and threats to democracy," using computer-assisted analysis to help them (Aucoin, 1993, p. 23).

In a basic sense, computer-assisted reporting can simply mean using a computer to help report a story: on-line research, electronic morgue searches, etc. At the advanced level, CAR means crunching raw data with a spreadsheet program or database manager, performing statistical analyses and using mapping software to show patterns. In fact, many authors have begun to use the term "computer-assisted investigative reporting" to describe data analysis, as opposed to the electronic gathering of background information (Friend, 1994, p. 63). For the purposes of this study, CAR will specifically refer to the definition involving data analysis.

One of the benefits of using CAR is that investigative reporters no longer need to be fearful of stating their claims. By using raw data and valid analytical techniques, reporters can use their own evidence to support their claims. Friend (1994) wrote, "data analysis allows a neutral approach to raw information ... By dealing directly with the facts, unadorned, reporters can bypass interpreted statistics and get beyond relying on anecdotal stories" (p. 65). Reisner (1995) claimed that CAR alters the traditional way of reporting: "The technique, in a way, turns traditional reporting on its head: Normally, reporters collect anecdotes and from them deduce trends. CAR lets reporters find trends, then collect the anecdotes to illustrate them." (p. 47).

This combination of CAR coupled with the investigative mindset has dramatically enhanced the power of the individual reporter. In many instances, reporters no longer have to rely on someone else's numbers and someone else's interpretation of those numbers; they have the power to generate scientific evidence themselves. Meyer promoted a type of journalism where the reporter evaluates and synthesizes the information using the rules of science: theory-based investigation, hypothesis testing and replicability (Meyer, 1973, 1991; Meyer & Jurgensen, 1992). As long as reporters understand statistics and data analysis, Meyer argued, they should be able to draw conclusions from their investigation—the ones that do will have a "value-added edge" (Meyer & Jurgensen, 1992, p. 269).

Indeed many journalists unwittingly practice the scientific method already (Stocking & LaMarca, 1990). Through qualitative interviews, the authors found that nearly 80 percent of reporters' stories began with hypotheses. However, a majority of these were implicit, which prompted the authors to conclude that "journalists, unlike scientists, do not routinely pose formal hypotheses as part of their method; instead, they appear to make formal speculations for some of their stories but not for others" (Stocking & LaMarca, 1990, p. 300).

Meyer (1991) argued that this is precisely the reason journalism needs to adopt and acknowledge the scientific method in reporting. Instead of everyone playing the part of the objective journalist while at the same time harboring preconceived notions, reporters should openly declare their hypotheses, methods and evidence so that they can be held up to rigorous scrutiny by others. In fact, Meyer and Jurgensen (1992) argued this would be even more objective than the present system: "[T]he discipline of forming a falsifiable hypothesis and then testing it is actually a way of preserving objectivity. When the test is operationalized, the hypothesis is made to stand or fall on the basis of an objective standard" (p. 270). With the power of sophisticated computer software and with the increasing availability of databases, the scientific method and journalism seem to be a natural fit.

Weinberg (1997) calls this "expert journalism," a term he credits to Lou Ureneck, the executive editor of the Portland (Maine) *Press Herald*. In 1991, the *Press Herald* began experimenting with expert journalism under the guidance of Ureneck. The paper assigned a business reporter to take an in-depth look into the failing state workers' compensation system. Ureneck (1992) said the system had been a disaster for nearly a decade and that his paper had done a poor job of covering the issue—the traditional hard news, episodic coverage had failed. The reporter was immersed in the issue and became an expert who Ureneck believed was qualified to make judgments on the story.

Since this first attempt, the *Press Herald* developed an "Expert Reporting Coaching Sheet" and has devoted more time and resources to its success. Ureneck (1994) said the reporters "state their conclusions up top without attribution from officials or authorities and rely on the body of the story to develop the evidence behind the conclusions" (p. 7). He noted that the evidence to support the conclusions often comes from original research into database records and cannot be attributed to an official. Ureneck (1994) described this type of journalism as an "eclectic mix" of existing forms, which has one goal—"to cut through the rhetoric and show readers where the weight of the evidence lies" (p. 12).

There has been criticism of Ureneck's approach (Newman, 1993). Many point to what happened after the workers' compensation series ran. The *Press Herald* published a front-page editorial that called for the system to be trashed and for the establishment of a blue-ribbon commission to rewrite the law. Additionally, and more controversial, the newspaper brought together all the parties in the conflict to "explain [the paper's] editorial position" (Ureneck, 1992, p. 6). Critics saw this as advocacy journalism where the paper was making and guiding the news. A reporter from a competing paper noted at the time: "Their reporting has shown a miraculous lack of curiosity about weaknesses in the blue ribbon report" (Newman, 1993, p. 13). Yet Ureneck (1994) is confident this journalistic style will benefit the press's image and believes more newspapers will use some form of analytical journalism to engage the reader.

The Audience's Perspective

The spread of such analytical journalism is fueled by the rapidly increasing use of computers to analyze data. A survey of 192 daily newspapers, which focused specifically on sophisticated data analysis, found more than half the newspaper readers in the United States were getting papers that did some kind of computer-assisted reporting (Friend, 1994). A more extensive survey subsequently found that two-thirds of large daily papers reported having some sort of CAR desk in the newsroom (Garrison, 1996).

From 1989 to 1996, there has been at least one Pulitzer-winning reporter who employed computer-analysis to uncover such stories as racism in mortgage loans, arson fraud, medical malpractice, government waste and lax building codes (Ciotta, 1996). Some in management see CAR as a way to possibly stem their ever-declining circulation by filling a niche and providing "high-impact" stories. Nieman Foundation curator, Bill Kovach, predicted CAR will revive what he calls a "moribund newspaper journalism" (Fitzgerald, 1992, p. 15).

All this rests upon the assumption that the readers will respond favorably to this kind of reporting. One of the worries Ureneck (1994) raised is how such journalism will "affect the credibility of the newspaper among its readers" (p. 9). Weinberg (1996) added that some critics believe the credibility of all journalists will decline if objectivity is completely abandoned. Recent polling data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press indicate that the public's dissatisfaction with the press has reached a new low. The percentage of respondents who said they believed that "news organizations get the facts straight" dropped from 55 percent in 1985 to 37 percent in 1997; the percentage of people who thought reports were "often inaccurate" rose from 34 percent to 56 percent in the same period (Peterson, 1997).

The importance of audience perception of news credibility has kept researchers studying the issue for more than five decades. One of the major problems with studying credibility, however, is defining and measuring the concept. By the 1960s, several researchers concluded that credibility was a multidimensional concept, although each study identified different dimensions (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Two main components, developed by Hovland, Irving, and Harold (1953), are "trustworthiness" and "expertise" of the source. Gaziano and McGrath (1986) attempted to pinpoint the various dimensions of credibility and find out which ones grouped together. Using factor analysis, the authors showed that 12 items loaded together: fairness, bias, completeness, accuracy, privacy, concern about reader's interest, concern about community well-being, separate fact and opinion, trustworthiness, concern about profits, opinion, and training of reporters.

Meyer (1988) examined the Gaziano and McGrath study and developed a more streamline index to measure newspaper credibility. He was looking for a basic measure of credibility, which he simply defined as "whether a newspaper is believed by its readers" (p. 573). He was able to trim the list of items down to five, which subsequently provided reliable results. These items were fairness, bias, completeness, accuracy, and trustworthiness, and were tested as semantic differential scales. Meyer's index serves as the measure of story credibility in this study.

Although no studies have tried to compare audience perceptions of computer-assisted journalism to more traditional journalism forms, Weaver and Daniels (1992) measured public opinion of investigative reporting through nationwide surveys. The authors found that a majority of the public considered investigative reporting to be "somewhat important" during the 1980s (p. 146). But Weaver and Daniels also found that certain techniques – hidden cameras, anonymous sources, paying sources, etc.—lowered the credibility of the reporters and of the news media employing them. From this study, it appears that the audience values the independence of investigative reporting, depending on the techniques used.

Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) study of television news offered some insight. They showed that the framing of a story matters and that the audience perceives stories differently based on the way evidence is presented. Iyengar and Kinder attempted to measure the "vividness bias," which states that people are often persuaded by reporting that relies on emotional, personal accounts to tell a story (p. 35). However, instead of persuading the audience by using vivid accounts, the authors found that the audience can differentiate between anecdotal (vivid) and analytical (pallid) evidence. Indeed, it seems that relying too much on a "good story" based on compelling but anecdotal details about an individual may reduce a story's believability and may result in a less convinced audience.

Another study indicated that readers tend to consider the content of the message rather than the source of the information (Austin & Dong, 1994). Austin and Dong suggested "the general public makes little distinction among sources. Any newspaper is simply a newspaper, and the story stands on its own merits" (p. 978). Although this study focused on the reputations of particular newspapers instead of on the credibility of journalists in general, the results indicated that the audience perceives a story to be credible based on the presentation of evidence and not on who is performing the analysis. Austin and Dong (1994) viewed their results as alarming because at least some people "may be analyzing messages without much thought to the reputation of the source" (p. 979). However, for analytical journalists this could be positive—if the evidence and analysis is convincing, the reader may find the reporters' conclusions as credible.

The dearth of research on audiences' perceptions of computer-assisted reporting led us to ask how such perceptions of reporting differ from perceptions of traditional reporting. Specifically, this study asks whether or not computer-assisted reporting affects how readers judge a story's credibility, newsworthiness, liking, quality, readability, and understanding.

Method

The study was a within-subjects experiment in which all participants read three newspaper stories: one with computer-assisted reporting data, one with official data, and one with anecdotal data. Thirty-three undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory journalism course at a large midwestern university volunteered to participate in this study. There were 15 men and 18 women.

Dependent variables

Credibility was defined as a five-item index, adapted from a previous study (Meyer, 1988). The five items used to measure credibility were bipolar pairs on seven-point scales: fair/unfair, biased/unbiased, accurate/inaccurate, can be trusted/can't be trusted, and tells the whole story/doesn't tell the whole story ($\alpha = .85$). This measurement tool was appropriate for the study because the concept deals directly with believability—the central issue this experiment addresses.

In addition to credibility, the study also included the following dependent variables: newsworthiness, liking, quality, readability, and understanding.

Newsworthiness was indexed by five bipolar pairs on seven-point scales: important/unimportant, interesting/uninteresting, informative/uninformative, serious/not serious, and disturbing/not disturbing ($\alpha = .81$). Story *liking, quality, readability,* and *understanding* were measured by single questions on seven-point response scales. Participants were asked to rate how much they liked each story on scale anchored by "very little" and "very much." They were also asked to rate the overall quality on a similar response scale, anchored by "poor quality" and "excellent quality." For readability, participants were asked to respond to "How difficult or easy was the story to read?" on a scale, anchored by "very difficult" and "very easy." Finally, participants were asked to respond to "How difficult or easy was the story to understand?" on scale anchored by "very difficult" and "very easy."

Independent variable

The independent variable, story type, was the type of evidence used to support a story's conclusions. For our purposes, story type had three levels: 1) reporter-generated evidence, 2) authoritative evidence, and 3) anecdotal evidence. Stories using reporter-generated evidence (computer-assisted reporting) based conclusions on independent data analysis from the reporter. Stories using authoritative evidence based conclusions on official and expert source analysis. Stories with anecdotal evidence based conclusions on individual case histories and source opinions, not on systematically obtained data.

The participants were given three stories to read—one for each of the three levels of the independent variable. The dependent variables were measured for each kind of story.

Test Materials

The stories used in the experiment were based on real-world, computer-assisted reporting examples but were extensively rewritten to suit the requirements of the study. A total of three different story topics were included to avoid message-specific effects. The three topics were: 1) racial discrimination in home mortgage lending, 2) inadequate restaurant inspections, and 3) medically unnecessary Cesarean sections. Each of these three story topics had three different versions, based upon the different levels of the independent variable: one with reporter-generated evidence, one with authoritative evidence, and one with anecdotal evidence. Thus, a total of nine distinct stories were used for the experiment.

For example, the story of racial discrimination in home mortgage lending, or bank redlining, had three different versions. The CAR version with reporter-generated evidence explicitly stated that the data used to support the story's conclusion was analyzed by the newspaper using a database of home mortgages. The authoritative version arrived at the same conclusion using the same statistical evidence, but the analysis and the source of the evidence was attributed to watchdog groups and officials. The anecdotal version also reached the same conclusion but only supplied evidence of personal case histories to highlight the problem of redlining. All three versions of the story had exactly the same headline, the same lead paragraph and arrived at the same conclusion (i.e. "Banks are redlining in minority neighborhoods of the city."). All other aspects of the stories were kept identical in hopes of controlling for unwanted message variance.

Each of the nine stories were designed and typeset as though they had appeared in an actual newspaper. To enhance this effect, the stories were printed on grainy paper and then photocopied on white paper as if they were originally cut from newsprint. All of the different versions were approximately the same length (about 1,100 words), and all fit onto one 8.5- by 11-inch photocopied page. The stories contained no masthead or advertisements but did have bylines that included the names of the fictitious newspapers: *Dayton County Register, The Courier-Times Journal* and *Bayview Daily News.*

Prior to the experiment, three university journalism professors reviewed all nine versions of the stories in order to ensure that they resembled and represented legitimate, professional work, which could have been published in the mainstream media.

Procedure

Participants received three different stories to read and a corresponding questionnaire for each story. Before the experiment began, the participants were told the stories had been previously published in actual newspapers. They were instructed to read the stories in the order they received them and to answer the questions after they finished reading each story. Participants took between 30 to 40 minutes to complete the experiment.

The stories were distributed so that each participant received three different versions of three story topics. Therefore, each participant read one story about redlining, one about restaurant safety, and one about Cesarean sections. One of these stories was the CAR version, one was the anecdotal version, and one was the official version. The story order was controlled using three random orders so that the different topics and the different versions were not presented in the same order.

Results

The research questions for each of the six dependent variables sought to compare the effects of stories that contain data from computer-assisted reporting as evidence against the two other story types—those with anecdotal evidence and those with official data evidence. Thus, the data were analyzed using planned contrasts in a repeated measures analysis of variance design in which computer-assisted stories were compared to each of the other two story types—official and anecdotal—for each of the six dependent variables.

Table 1 shows the results of the planned contrasts (means accompanied by a superscript are significantly different from the CAR version stories) and the multivariate *F*-test for each of the six dependent variables across the three treatments.

For the credibility index, the means of all three story types showed no significant differences ($F_{(2,64)} = 1.18$, p = n.s.) nor did the CAR stories differ from the other two story types (CAR $M = 4.75$ vs. anecdotal $M = 4.87$, $F_{(1,32)} = 0.17$, p = n.s.; CAR vs. official $M = 5.11$, $F_{(1,32)} = 1.58$, p = n.s.). These data suggest that readers perceived no difference in credibility among the types of evidence provided in each of the stories. Thus, the primary research question of this study was answered in the negative.

A similar pattern of no significance was found for the newsworthiness index ($F_{(2,64)} = 0.26$, p = n.s.; CAR $M = 5.66$ vs. anecdotal $M = 5.52$,$F_{(1,32)} = 0.44$, p = n.s.; CAR vs. official $M = 5.67$, $F_{(1,32)} = 0.00$, p = n.s.). These data suggest that readers perceived no difference in newsworthiness among the types of evidence provided in each of the stories. Nor was there a significant effect for story type and the reported ease of understanding the story. Although the mean for CAR on understanding was lower than the means for both anecdotal and official, the differences did not reach the level of significance ($F_{(2,64)} = 1.00$, p = n.s.; CAR $M = 5.12$ vs. anecdotal $M = 5.67$, $F_{(1,32)} = 1.74$, p = n.s.; CAR vs. official $M = 5.36$, $F_{(1,32)} = 0.36$, p = n.s.).

Table 1. Mean ratings of news stories as a function of type of evidence used in the stories. ($N = 33$)

	Story Type			
Dependent Variables	CAR version	Anecdotal version	Official version	F-value
Credibility	4.75 (1.43)	4.87 (1.08)	5.11 (1.04)	1.18
Newsworthiness	5.66 (0.87)	5.52 (1.25)	5.67 (0.91)	0.26
Liking	$3.88^{a,b}$ (1.50)	4.76^{a} (1.37)	4.79^{b} (1.62)	5.26**
Quality	4.58^{a} (1.46)	5.03 (1.59)	5.18^{a} (1.13)	2.56*
Understanding	5.12 (1.82)	5.67 (1.67)	5.36 (1.45)	1.00
Readability	5.06^{c} (1.82)	6.15^{c} (0.94)	5.52 (1.42)	5.79**

Note: Cell entries are means. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Superscripts a and b are significant at the $p < .05$ level. Superscript c is significant at the $p < .001$ level. $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$.

There were however, three sets of significant findings where the mean for the CAR stories were different than the means for the anecdotal and official story types. First, participants rated their liking for the CAR stories significantly *lower* than their liking for the other two story types (CAR $M = 3.88$ vs. anecdotal $M = 4.76$, $F_{(1,32)} = 4.00$, $p < .05$, eta-squared = .11; CAR vs. official $M = 4.79$, $F_{(1,32)} = 5.79$, $p < .05$, eta-squared = .15).

Second, participants rated the quality of the CAR story significantly *lower* than they did for the official story (CAR $M = 4.58$ vs. official $M = 5.18$, $F_{(1,32)} = 4.86$, $p < .05$, eta-squared = .13). Although the CAR stories were also rated lower than the anecdotal stories ($M = 5.03$), the mean difference and the relatively large variances of the two (see Table 1) reduced the likelihood of observing a significant difference.

In addition to liking and quality, the other dependent variable that produced significant results was readability. Readability, the extent to which participants rated the how easy it was to read the story, was significantly *lower* for CAR stories than for anecdotal stories (CAR $M = 5.06$ vs. anecdotal $M = 6.15$, $F_{(1,32)} = 15.71$, $p < .001$, eta-squared = .33). The CAR and official stories did not differ significantly for readability.

Discussion

This study attempted to explore how readers perceive computer-assisted reporting in which journalists generate statistical evidence to support the claims made in their stories. Such reporting is a departure from traditional journalism techniques of relying on either official and/or expert sources or on anecdotal sources to supply evidence and data. Instead of simply disseminating the claims and counterclaims from "acceptable" sources (the "he said/she said" kind of story), CAR journalists are entering the fray and can add their voice to the discussion through original, independent research and data analysis. This has been a controversial step for journalism as many critics believe that moving away from objective reporting will further erode the public's trust and satisfaction with the news media. The experiment, however, provides some evidence in concert with this criticism. After reading three versions (one CAR, one official and one anecdotal) for three different stories, the participants found no difference in credibility among the stories. However, participants liked the CAR stories less than the other two story types, and rated the CAR stories as lower in quality than the official versions. CAR stories were also rated harder to read than the anecdotal versions.

This is not to say that CAR stories are globally perceived as more negative than traditional reporting. Even if the participants recognized the different sources of evidence in the stories, they simply did not perceive the CAR stories to be any less credible or newsworthy than the other story types. The readers' news judgment could be based exclusively on the content of the article and not on the supplier of that evidence, whether it be a journalist, an official, or a common individual. If the results of the experiment are interpreted in this way, CAR journalists should have receptive audiences for their work—as long as their evidence and analyses are cogent, compelling, and most of all, clear. In other words, the participants in this experiment found the CAR versions of the stories to be at least as credible as compared to the official and anecdotal versions. Participants may have accepted the evidence that was provided based on its merits, and in doing so, accepted a type of journalism with a more proactive role in the news-making process. This interpretation would be similar to the result found in the Austin and Dong (1994) study mentioned earlier. Their research concluded that readers did not distinguish among sources but rather judged stories based on the quality of the content (Austin & Dong, 1994).

Although the perceived credibility and newsworthiness of computer-assisted reporting did not appear different from more traditional forms of evidence, the experiment also showed that the CAR stories were generally disliked and rated lower in quality than the other versions. These differences were not only between the CAR stories and the anecdotal stories (liking) but also between the CAR and the official versions (liking and quality). One possible explanation for these findings is that even though the participants found the CAR evidence credible (at least as credible than the other story types), they might not think that such proactive reporting methods constitute traditional, quality journalism. If the general cynicism toward the news media is reflected in liking of the story, readers might conclude that a story with too much involvement by the journalist is one of "poor" quality and is also liked less. Such a relationship between liking and quality was found in this study as the two variables were significantly correlated ($r = 0.55, p < .01$).

CAR stories were also rated harder to read than the anecdotal stories. For CAR journalists, these results indicate the importance of including a variety of data sources to buttress their claims. If the story contained expert and official sources in addition to the reporter's own analyses, it might appear that the reporter is more neutral and less proactive to the reader. Additionally, CAR journalism should not rely solely on the statistical evidence to tell the whole story. As seen in the experiment, humanizing the evidence is important to the audience and makes the story more readable. CAR journalists need to be conscious about overloading the story with their independently collected data and about including additional sources, both supporting and opposing their own evidence. The reporter's voice has a place in the discussion but it should not be the only one heard.

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Journalists and Gender:

An Analysis of *The New York Times* Coverage of the 1996 U.S. Presidential Election

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Journalists and Gender:
An Analysis of *The New York Times* Coverage of the 1996 U.S. Presidential Election

Abstract

Content analysis of 339 election stories from *The New York Times* found striking similarities between stories written by women and men. This study examined whether or not women reporters were more likely to use gender-relevant frames, refer to the "women's vote," report on typical women's themes, and include female sources more often than men. Regardless of gender, journalists avoided using simple sex stereotypes and women continued to be underrepresented as news sources and reporters.

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A press release from the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University the day following the 1996 U.S. Presidential Election proclaimed, "Women Make News as Voters, Edge Upward as Officeholders" (Walsh, 1996, p. 1). The lead sentence of the release reads, "Women once again made headlines in the 1996 elections, this time as voters, with women giving President Clinton his margin of victory" (p. 1). While this emphasis on the importance of the women's vote would be expected from a Center whose "mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's changing relationship to politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life" (p. 2), the prominence of similar gender-specific headlines in *The New York Times* is more indicative of the issue's salience in the mainstream media.

These examples were noted in *The New York Times* during the month leading up to the election. The headline for one story on October 6, 1996, was "Politics -- Political Battle of the Sexes is Tougher Than Ever; Suburbs' Soccer Moms, Fleeing the G.O.P., Are Much Sought" (Goldberg, 1996). Another story on October 20, 1996, carried the headline, "Don't Forget Soccer Dads; What's a Soccer Mom Anyway?" (MacFarquhar, 1996) and a third story on October 28, 1996, had this headline, "Politics: The Democrat; Clinton Campaign Puts an Emphasis on Female Voters" (Mitchell, 1996). These headlines also seem to support Norris's (1997) contention that "gender is one of the primary fault-lines running through contemporary American politics" (p. 1).

In *Women, Media, and Politics,* Norris (1997) contends that political issues involving gender divide politicians, parties, and voters in the United States. Additionally, she raises questions about the way media cover gender politics, how women journalists are faring in the 1990s, and whether or not the growth of women in newsrooms has influenced news coverage. The research study I conducted addresses the latter question by trying find out what differences, if any, there are between news stories created by women and news stories created by men. Do women journalists report more frequently on themes typically identified as relevant to women and children? Are women journalists more likely to use female news sources than men and cite more regular people as sources ? Do women journalists use gender-relevant frames in their stories more often than men and do these frames reference the importance of the women's vote? These are some of the basic questions underlying this research project.

The study attempts to answer these questions as they relate to *The New York Times* news coverage of the 1996 Presidential Election Campaign. This election is appropriate for a gender-based study because of the notable eleven-percentage-point split between men and women voters. Voter News Service statistics from the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University (Walsh, 1996) indicate only 43% of men voted for President Bill Clinton, while 54% of women voted for Clinton. This "gender gap" -- the difference between the proportion of women and the proportion of men who vote for a candidate -- was noted in all age groups, ranging from a 17-point difference between men and women under the age of 30, to an eight-point difference for those between the ages of 45 to 59. In the 1992 Presidential Election the difference was smaller, with 45% of women and 41% of men voting for Clinton (Connelly, 1996). While evidence of a "gender gap" in voter preference is not unusual, its magnitude in the 1996 Presidential Election adds to the relevance of gender specific research.[1]

The significance of the study

This is an important area for study because of the scarcity and inconclusive nature of research about whether women journalists make a difference in news coverage or if other constraining factors, such as newsroom culture and structure, inhibit the effect of individual differences. In Norris's book (1997), Mills gives examples that suggest that women have made a difference in news coverage of politics, but the study does not present systematic evidence. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge by systematically analyzing political news stories written by men and women journalists from *The New York Times*.

The New York Times was selected for analysis not only because of the paper's "elite" status and prominence in prior content analysis research, but also because of its history of exclusionary or unequal treatment of women journalists. This has been traced back to Adolph S. Ochs, the legendary publisher credited with turning *The New York Times* into the nation's "newspaper of record" and who thought up the *Times* motto "All the News That's Fit to Print." Robertson (1992) notes that Ochs fought against women's voting rights, both personally and in his *Times* editorials. Ochs also took an unyielding stand against having women in the newsroom:

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[1] A "gender gap" refers to differences between the sexes. Various studies of politics and media have confirmed the existence of a gender gap in presidential elections, congressional elections, voter turnout, party identification, presidential evaluation, policy preferences, and attitudes toward issues. See for example, Conover, P. J. (1988). Feminists and the gender gap. *The Journal of Politics*, 50(4), 985-1010. Jennings, M. K. (1988). Preface (pp. 7 - 12); Kenski, H. C. (1988). The gender factor in a changing electorate (pp. 38-60) and Miller, A. (1988). Gender and the vote: 1984 (pp. 258-282), in C. M. Mueller (Ed.), *The politics of the gender gap: The social construction of political influence.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. Kohut, A., & Parker, K. (1997). Talk radio and gender politics, (pp. 221-234) and Ladd, E. C. (1997). Media framing of the gender gap (pp. 113-128). In P. Norris (Ed.), *Women, media, and politics.* New York: Oxford University Press. Also Shapiro, R. Y., & Mahajan, H. (1986). Gender differences in policy preferences: A summary of trends from the 1960s to the 1980s. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 50, 42-61.

> For forty years, from 1896 until his death in 1935, the man who brought the *Times* to its present eminence did not want women in the ranks of those who gathered and wrote the news. "We have almost a prohibition against the employment of women on our editorial staff," Ochs told another publisher during World War I, when many newspapers were bringing women in to fill the jobs left by men going off to the armed forces. (p. 19)

Even Pulitzer Prize winner Anne O'Hare McCormick was not put on the *New York Times* staff until 1936, a year after Ochs's death. Until that time, she had been paid by the piece, as a stringer, for her foreign affairs reports which included exclusive interviews with numerous world leaders like Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini.

By the early 1970s, a group of *New York Times* employees formed a Women's Caucus with the goal of addressing salary inequities and women's underrepresentation in management positions. After more than two years of unsatisfactory discussion with *Times* management, six women filed a sex discrimination lawsuit against the newspaper on November 7, 1974 (Diamond, 1993, p. 168). By 1977, this suit, known as *Boylan* v. *The New York Times*, was declared a class-action suit representing about 550 women employees. The case was eventually settled out-of-court in 1978 with *The New York Times* agreeing "to a new affirmative action plan, promising to place significant numbers of women at every level in every news and business department" (Robertson, 1992, pp. 207-208). The $350,000 financial settlement included back pay to women employee's averaging $454.54 per person, which management called annuities. However, Robertson notes, "From the hour the settlement terms were announced, the *Times* management team maintained the pose they had assumed long before -- that nothing whatever had been wrong" (p. 209).

From 1978 through the 1980s, more women were hired at *The New York Times* and moved into management positions. By January 1, 1990, Carolyn Lee would assume the duties of the first woman assistant managing editor in the history of *The New York Times*, "in charge of personnel for the entire editorial staff, one thousand strong, with a budget of $100 million and the power to hire from outside or promote or transfer within" (Robertson, 1992, p. 225). Another major change for women occurred in 1986 when "Ms." became accepted *Times* style, in addition to Miss and Mrs. references. Diamond (1993) notes that this change followed more than a decade of internal debate between key male editors and publisher Arthur Ochs (Punch) Sulzberger, the grandson of publisher Adolf S. Ochs.

In view of these historical issues involving women journalists at *The New York Times*, a gender-relevant study seems particularly appropriate and timely. This study includes a content analysis of all staff-generated news stories carried in *The New York Times* during the three months preceding the 1996 Presidential Election. The stories were analyzed for a number of gender factors, including sources used, issues covered, which aspects of issues were covered, and from what perspective, as well as whether any of these gender factors could be linked to the gender of the journalist writing the story. This approach illuminates similarities and differences between the stories created by women and men journalists at *The New York Times.*

Literature Review

To begin, it is important to locate this study in relation to prior research. These studies can be categorized by three general themes: 1) gender studies in relation to feminist theory, the media, and framing; 2) gender studies about news coverage involving women; and 3) gender studies about journalists and gender differences.

1) Feminist Theory, the Media, and Framing

There is a large body of gender-related media research originating from various feminist perspectives which locate power in language. In "Feminist Perspectives on the Media," van Zoonen (1991) says that although liberal, radical, and socialist feminist theories have dramatically different approaches, they share a basic perspective on communication. According to van Zoonen, "Media are perceived as the main instruments in conveying respectively stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women and femininity. They serve as mechanisms of social control" (p.41). She says that throughout much of contemporary feminist theory is the notion that the sex-gender system involves the exploitation and/or oppression of women. Thus, in order to address this exploitation and/or oppression, we must expose and challenge media misrepresentations of women.

Many communication scholars take a more moderate view about the relevance of gender-related research. Foss and Foss (1989) link the importance of gender and culture in communication research. "The starting point of the feminist perspective is that there is no more fundamental issue to a culture than gender; the construction of gender on the basis of biological sex has implications for all human experience" (p. 65). McQuail (1994) agrees in his assessment that "the question of gender touches almost every aspect of the media--culture relationship. Most central is probably is the question of gender definition" (p. 101).

For the purposes of this study, I propose using Harding's (1986) definition of gender "as an analytic category within which humans think about and organize their social activity, rather than as a natural consequence of sex-difference" (p. 17). It also seems appropriate to accept van Zoonen's (1991) argument that the meaning of gender "is never given but varies according to specific cultural and historical settings, and that its meaning is subject to ongoing discursive struggle and negotiation" (p. 45). This pluralistic view of the definition of gender moves the discussion away from the value questions relating to masculinity or femininity and toward mass communication research issues related to understanding not only gender differences, but also similarities.

Along a similar line, Jennings (1988) offers a three part model to explain the evolution of "gender gap" studies in politics. Jennings says that prior to the 1960s, the convergence model was evident in most studies because sex explained little variance in voting preferences. "Women's lesser political involvement, as conventionally defined, was the most significant exception to this pattern" (p.10-11). By the 1960s and 1970s, a divergence model took over during the time of the women's movement and increased involvement in the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment debate. As Jennings points out, "Divergence is inherent in the term gender gap" (p. 11). Jennings' call is for a normative model of gender divergence, saying research should continue to highlight the convergence of the sexes, but at the same time reveal pressures and tendencies at work toward divergence.

This normative model seems particularly appropriate for gender studies of journalists and news coverage because there are a number of factors that work toward convergence. These include newsroom socialization, the structure of news work, and the traditions of journalism which emphasize balance and objectivity. At the same time, gender-based research should attempt to reveal pressures and tendencies that work toward divergence involving journalists and to minimize the potential for misrepresentation of women in news coverage. This normative model works well in conjunction with the current study of gender factors in news stories involving the 1996 Presidential Election because it allows for appreciation of similarity and difference.

In order to discover similarities and differences in media content, we can look at the news process in terms of framing (Goffman, 1974). Tuchman (1978) used the notion of a frame for the analysis of newswork and concludes that news is a social resource and a source of power, but that it also legitimates the status quo. Since Tuchman's time, frame analysis has been used to illuminate the media coverage of different social movements and has been applied to news discourse in a number of different studies.[2] Pan and Kosicki (1993) used frame analysis to examine news texts for organizational patterns, thematic structures related to policy issues, and for rhetorical structures -- meaning the individual word choices used by journalists.

Similarly, Entman (1993) noted that texts contain frames "which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (p. 52). He also argued that the political arena is a key area for evidence of framing because politicians compete with each other and with journalists over news frames. "Framing in this light plays a major role in the exertion of political power, and the frame in the news text is really the imprint of power -- it registers the identity of actors or interests that compete to dominate the text" (p. 55).

More recently, research on the news media's framing of gender politics has become more prominent. Norris (1997) presents a theory of framing which suggests that journalists commonly work with "gendered" frames to simplify and prioritize their story ideas. This means that gender can be one important element that is relevant to the way the story is presented and interpreted. Norris suggests that news frames are either gender-neutral or gender-relevant. Gender-neutral is defined as labeling, categorizing, or describing people or issues with no reference to being male or female. Gender-relevant is defined as labeling, categorizing, or describing people or issues with a specific reference to being male or female. This would include references which are gender specific by definition, such as wife, mother daughter, matronly, etc. for women or husband, father, son, patronly, etc. for men. Norris argues that the use of gender-relevant news frames may be beneficial or detrimental to women in terms of their participation in public life:

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[2] For an explication of framing and frame theory, see Roefs, 1998. For examples of additional studies involving analysis of news discourse, see: Gamson, 1989; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Entman, 1991; Entman & Rojecki, 1993.)

> What has changed in recent decades is that the heightened salience of gender politics on the American agenda means that news frames have become increasingly gendered on an explicit basis. That is, gender has come to be seen as a relevant peg for the story line whether covering candidates running for office, voters at the ballot box, international leaders, or policy debates about welfare reform, abortion, and affirmative action. (p. 6-7)

In a similar context, Jamieson (1995) analyzed the gender-relevant framing of news stories in several elite newspapers and found that reporters used predominantly negative gender distinctions when referencing women political candidates and female public officials, while men were more likely to be the subject of positive gender distinctions or gender-neutral framing. A positive gender distinction would include a reference to one's gender as being beneficial in some way. A negative gender distinction would include a reference to one's gender as being a hinderance or drawback. One example cited by Jamieson appeared in the *Dallas Morning News:*

> Gender aside, analysts from both parties say Mr. Krueger must come out swinging if he hopes to be the victor in the June 5 runoff. But political experts caution that trying to bloody a female opponent could provoke a gender backlash. "I think you can say almost anything to a man and not be hurt by it," said former Texas Attorney General Jim Mattox, who lost to Ms. Richards in the Democratic primary two years ago. "But I think you can

> cause overwhelming support to go in the other direction if you say something that is offensive to a woman." (p. 176.)

Here, being a woman politician is beneficial because it limits the forms of "acceptable" verbal attack allowed by the opponent. On the other hand, there is a negative gender distinction involving a man politician who sees this "limitation" as a drawback or hinderance for his campaign.

Jamieson also found that women covered in news articles are more likely to be described in terms of their appearance, age, marital status, and parental status than men. In contrast, Jamieson found that men were rarely described in terms beyond their occupation, profession, or educational level. Jamieson concludes by saying, "Inherent in each is the notion that men are the norm and women, other. By treating women as exceptions, reporters reinforce this assumption" (p. 167).

In summary, this body of literature presents support for the idea that power, and political power in particular, exists in language and that the language presented by the news media often involves gender differentiation. This differentiation has been found in news media content by researchers applying various methods of frame analysis, including research on gender-relevant frames used by journalists in political coverage. These gender-relevant frames can have a beneficial effect on women's involvement in the political process, but historically, that has not been the case.

2) News Coverage Involving Women

In commenting on the 1995 *Women, Men, and Media* study, Betty Friedan said, "Women are being symbolically annihilated by the media" (Hernandez, 1995, p. 56). The study examined television news programs and newspapers to determine the amount of coverage that was given to females in story references and photographs, and it found that the average front-page references to women dropped from 25% in 1994 to 19% in 1995. The 1995 study was the 7th annual month-long study commissioned by the *Women, Men, and Media* project. These studies have consistently found that women are significantly underrepresented in news content (Bridge, 1994; Women, Men, & Media, 1997). The 1996 study focused on network television news and found similar results about news content, although the presence of female reporters on the nightly newscasts (on ABC, CBS, NBC) increased to 19%.

Fridkin Kahn (1996) conducted eight studies involving news coverage of women political candidates. Among the conclusions drawn from these studies are that "women's access to political office may be limited by people's stereotypical views of women's capabilities and liabilities. By influencing the behavior of candidates, the quality of press coverage, and the reactions of the voters, these stereotypical views hamper women in their campaigns for higher political office" (p. 131). She also claims that news media give women candidates less issue coverage than their male counterparts.

Earlier studies (See for example: Davis, 1982; Jolliffe, 1989; Shaw, Cole, Moore, & Cole, 1982; Turk, 1987) found that in newspaper stories women were identified more often than men by personal information, such as attire, physical description, and marital or parental status, while men were more likely to be identified by occupation, experience and background. These studies also showed that women are not given equal space in newspaper coverage and that the proportion of their working world activities are not accurately reflected in the news content.

Hitchon and Chang (1995) identified specific personality traits in news stories associated with male candidates (independent, competitive, strong leader, insensitive, aggressive, tough, ambitious, assertive, coarse, stern, forceful, self-sufficient, defends own beliefs, and strong personality). The personality traits in news stories associated with female candidates included dependent, noncompetitive, passive, gentle, sensitive, cautious, compassionate, and sensitive to the needs of others. The authors also indicated that effective women politicians were often described by reporters with the male personality trait references.

Norris (1997) compared news coverage of female and male world leaders. The results indicated that each male leader was covered in about 1,600 stories per year, compared with 1,400 stories for each female leader. Additionally, Norris used a qualitative analysis of news stories to identify gender relevant frames or stereotypical language. She concluded that women leaders were less visible in the news, although the difference in the amount of coverage was not great. Second, there was little evidence that journalists use simple sex stereotypes when covering women leaders. And, third, that news media employed common gendered frames for their stories. These common frames were the "first woman" news frame, a "women leader as the outsider" news frame, and a "woman leader as agent of change" news frame.

3) Journalists and Gender Differences

National studies covering the past three decades indicate that women journalists made dramatic progress in terms of overall employment numbers from 1971 to 1982-83, but from 1982-83 to 1992, there was little change in the employment numbers (Lafky, 1991; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) summarize the findings, pointing out that in 1971, about one fifth of working U.S. journalists were women. By 1983, that number had climbed to just over one-third, but the 1992 percentage remained almost the same at 34%. These studies also show that by 1992 women journalists had similar education levels as men and that the income gap between men and women had decreased. In 1992, women were making 81% of what men were, on average, compared to 64% in 1970.

Other studies have examined specific problem areas involving women journalists, including an underepresentation of women in editorial positions. Mills (1993) points out that none of America's four most prestigious newspapers had named women as editors in the five years prior to the "Year of the Woman" in 1992-93, and no woman has ever been in charge of a broadcast network news division. Otto (1993), on the other hand, sees as positive the fact that editorial writing is no longer the exclusive domain of men. She writes that "in 1991, 18.4% of all news editors, assistant managing editors, and editorial page executives were women" (p. 158).

Regardless of how the numbers are interpreted, there are some indications that women journalists are making progress in terms of prestige and respectability. Mills (1993) writes:

> The "boys on the bus" during the 1992 presidential campaign increasingly were women--Cokie Roberts, Susan Spencer, Helen Thomas, Andrea Mitchell, Elizabeth Arnold, Ann Compton and scores more. They stood before the cameras during the Persian Gulf war and are covering Somalia and Bosnia. They reported from the World Series and are winning more and more Pulitzer Prizes, including awards for stories on rape and child abuse. (p. 24).

Burkhart and Sigelman (1990) found no byline bias against women reporters in their experimental studies using college students. One of the experiments finds that women journalists tended to be evaluated somewhat higher on such variables as "trustworthiness," "writing style," and "accuracy." The study suggests that a "pro-male bias in the evaluation of written works is less evident today than it once seemed to be" (p. 498).

A sample of the randomly selected dates of final editions of the ten top U.S. dailies in 1992 was studied for by-line gender and story content. It found women were under represented on the by-lines for Page One Stories (Who's covering what, 1993). This content analysis showed that men wrote 71% of the stories and women wrote 29%. Men wrote on war, politics, and technology, while women wrote on education, social issues, and health. This study exemplifies the traditional gender separation between women and men journalists in terms of the amount of news and the topics covered.

However, when journalists themselves are questioned about news coverage issues, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) cite "few detectable differences between men and women journalists in their perceptions of which news media roles were most and least important, and in their opinions on which questionable reporting practices might be justified on occasion and which should not be approved under any circumstances" (p. 190). Rather, this study showed opinions on these issues were much more likely to vary by news organization type or racial and ethnic background than by gender. Based on these findings, the authors question "whether news coverage is likely to change much as more women enter journalism and assume positions of responsibility" (p. 190). Weaver (1997) adds that more women journalists "will not automatically result in changes in news coverage of politics or other subjects unless the culture of newsrooms, the structure of news work, and the traditions of journalism change" (p. 38.).

Despite these conclusions, Weaver (1997) did find some evidence of differences in subjects by gender of journalist when individual news stories were analyzed. This analysis found that stories written by women were more likely to be concerned with social problems and protests with an emphasis on news of personalities and human interest, rather than on more traditional government and crime news. The findings "also suggest that journalists, especially women, may be stepping out of more conventional news beat systems and tapping ordinary people as sources more often" (p.39).

Mills (1997) claims that women and men have different sets of experience and these differences have changed "the definition, and therefore the coverage, of news" (p. 41). Mills presents an historical analysis of news changes related to women becoming more prominent in U.S. journalism and interview information from women journalists to support her claims. She cites headlines covering female topics such as menopause, sexism, and child care as evidence that the definition of news is changing. Mills also notes, "There are few studies documenting the impact of gender on news coverage on a more systematic basis" (p. 45).

One study that did attempt to document differences based on reporter gender was a 1992 Center for Media and Public Affairs study which concluded that the "tone" of abortion news depends on the reporter's gender ("Gender a factor," 1992). Researchers examined 224 news stories from network television and weekly news magazines during May, 1992, and found that women journalists presented more pro-choice or abortion rights quotes (56% abortion rights to 44% anti-abortion), while men journalists featured mostly pro-life or anti-abortion quotes (35% abortion rights to 65% anti-abortion). The report also notes that since most stories were reported by men journalists, "the overall balance tilted toward the anti-abortion side" (p. 2).

Tracking gender differences was also the emphasis of Liebler and Smith's (1997) content analysis of 159 network television news stories covering the Clinton Administration's first one hundred days. The study found few differences between women and men reporters in their choice and treatment of male and female sources. However, they did find that male reporters were more likely to cover foreign policy, while women reporters were more likely to report on social issues. These authors also called for additional study of "the quality of coverage, such as the framing of women in the public arena, or how women are actually quoted, and whether these practices vary with reporter gender" (p. 66).

Two exploratory studies by the author, as yet unpublished, have been based on Norris's and Jamieson's concepts of gender relevant framing and tracking differences based on reporter gender. The first study involved a content analysis of 208 National Public Radio stories aired during the 1996 Presidential Election Campaign. This exploratory study found women reporters on N.P.R. were more likely to use gender-relevant frames, were more likely to use gender distinctions, were more likely to quote more female sources per story, and were more likely to cover stories involving typical women's issues than their male colleagues.

The second study, a content analysis of 300 stories from *The New York Times, Washington Post,* and National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered,* found equitable treatment in news coverage of Madeline K. Albright during her initial year as the first female U.S. Secretary of State. This study showed that journalists were not likely to rely on simple sex stereotypes when covering a female leader in a non-traditional role, regardless of the gender of the reporter. Although similarities were noted in news stories created by men and women, differences were also evident. Women reporters were more likely to use gender-relevant news frames and to make gender distinctions within their stories than men reporters, but men reporters were more likely to cite Albright as a source and to quote her words directly. The numbers in this study indicate that women continue to be underrepresented both as news sources and as reporters.

Research Hypotheses

Building upon the wealth of information contained in this gender-related research and returning to the original research question -- what differences, if any, are there in news stories created by women and news stories created by men? -- I developed the following hypotheses:

1. Women reporters will be more likely to report on themes typically identified as relevant to women and children than men reporters.
2. Women reporters will be more likely to include female sources in their stories than men reporters.
3. Women reporters will be more likely to include regular people as sources than men reporters.

These hypotheses are based specifically on findings from prior gender studies noted in the literature review.

4. Women reporters will be more likely to use gender-relevant frames than men reporters.
5. Women reporters will be more likely to reference the importance of the women's vote than men reporters.

These hypotheses are based on the assumption that women reporters would be more aware of and/or comfortable with highlighting gender differences.

6. All reporters will be unlikely to reference the physical appearance of news sources and subjects, regardless of gender.
7. All reporters will be unlikely to reference the familial or marital status of the male candidates.

These hypotheses are based on the author's recent research which showed that reporters were not likely to make references to physical appearance and familial or marital status when describing news sources or subjects. Both of these areas have been noted in past studies as evidence of the marginalization of women through stereotypical references about the way they look or dress and whether or not they were married and had children.

Method

The method used to address the hypotheses was a content analysis of 339 staff-generated news stories carried in *The New York Times* during the three months preceding the 1996 U.S. Presidential Election. The transcripts for all news stories from August 10, 1996, to November 4, 1996, were obtained from the *Lexis/Nexis* document service by using the search words Bill Clinton or Bob Dole and election. Opinion columns and op-ed items were excluded, leaving a population of 339 stories to be coded.

The coding consisted of answering questions and identifying topics based on a coding scheme developed to address the research hypotheses (See Appendix A). Each story was read at least once and analyzed for such things as the number, gender, and type of source used, and the gender of the reporter. Additionally, the stories were coded according to whether or not they contained a gender-neutral or gender-relevant frame, as defined by Norris, and whether this included a reference to the importance of the women's vote. Definitions and examples of gender-relevant frames are included on the coding scheme document. The main topic of the story was coded and another question asked if any topic was related to a woman's issue. For the purpose of this study, a woman's issue is defined as an issue that primarily affects females in society, such as reproductive health, family planning, abortion, childcare, sexual harassment, rape, sexual discrimination, domestic violence, and feminism. References to physical appearance or attire of sources and subjects were coded, as were familial or marital status references to either candidate, Bill Clinton or Bob Dole.

The author was the primary coder for this content analysis and another graduate student coded a random sample of 34 stories, representing 10% of the overall sample to assess the post hoc reliability of the coding scheme. Using the Krippendorff Canonical Matrix Formula, an overall coder agreement level of .9181 was calculated, based on the individual Krippendorff alphas of the 23 coded variables. After the coding was completed, the content analysis data were analyzed using the *SPSS 7.5* program and included running frequency distributions, descriptive statistics, crosstabulations and measures of association appropriate for nominal-level data (Phi/Cramer's V). Tests of statistical significance (Chi-square) were not appropriate because the population of all *New York Times* election stories within the given time frame were coded, rather than a random sample.

Findings

There were 68 different *New York Times* reporters who contributed stories that were analyzed for content during this study. This included 46 (68%) men reporters and 22 (32%) women reporters and is roughly equivalent to the two-thirds, one-third ratio of male to female reporters noted in the Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) survey of national journalists. Similar percentages were noted in the number of stories written by individual reporters. Of the 339 stories coded in this study, 232 (68.4%) were written by male reporters, compared to 107 (31.6%) written by female reporters. When story location is compared based on reporter gender, the percentage differential decreases to less than 9%, with about one-third of the election stories written by men appearing on page one and about one-fourth of the election stories written by women appearing on page one (See Table 1). This finding corresponds with prior research which shows that men are more likely to have bylines on page one than women reporters and this difference is still present even though all stories in this study involve coverage of the 1996 Presidential Election campaign.

Table 1

Reporter Gender * Story Location Crosstabulation

			Story Location		Total
			Page One	Inside	
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	26	81	107
		% within Reporter Gender	24.3%	75.7%	100.0%
	Male	Count	77	155	232
		% within Reporter Gender	33.2%	66.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	103	236	339
		% within Reporter Gender	30.4%	69.6%	100.0%

Phi = -.09 Approx. Sig. = .098

Story location was originally coded into five separate categories but was recoded into page one and inside because business and lifestyle stories made up less than 6 % of the total stories.

Story length was also coded into five categories, ranging from under 500 words to 2001 words and over. This category was recoded into two categories of 1000 words or less and more than 1000 words for ease of comparison. As the data indicate, women reporters were more likely to write shorter stories than their male colleagues (See Table 2).

Table 2

Reporter Gender * Story Length Crosstabulation

			Story Length		
			1000 Words or Less	More Than 1000 Words	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	59	48	107
		% within Reporter Gender	55.1%	44.9%	100.0%
	Male	Count	101	131	232
		% within Reporter Gender	43.5%	56.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	160	179	339
		% within Reporter Gender	47.2%	52.8%	100.0%

Phi = .108 Approx. Sig. = .047

The different male-to-female reporter ratios noted above do allow for comparisons based on gender and lead to the discussion of the research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Women reporters will be more likely to report on themes typically identified as relevant to women and children than men reporters.

Story topic was coded first into 12 main topic areas with an option to code a secondary topic from the same 12 topic areas. As might be expected, the topic area covering candidate qualifications, poll standings, political strategies, campaign tactics, and campaign finance represented the main topic in 257 (75.8%) stories and the secondary topic in another 37 (10.9%) stories. The second most frequent topic was voters' views and/or opinions, noted as the main topic in 31 (9.1%) stories and as the secondary topic in another 5 (1.5%) stories. The other 10 main topic areas combined represented less than 14% of the total stories with percentages ranging from a high of 3.5% (12 stories) for economic growth, budget deficit, taxes, corporate downsizing, and business to a low of 0.3% (1 story) for the religion/school prayer category and 0.3% (1 story) for the trade, labor, and agriculture category. Only 84 (24.8%) stories were identified as having a secondary topic and almost half of those were in the candidate qualifications category mentioned above. Crosstabulations based on reporter gender for main topic and secondary topic areas revealed no notable differences between the topic areas covered by male and female reporters.

Additionally, each story was analyzed for any reference to a women's issue, defined as an issue that affects primarily females in society, such as reproductive health, family planning, abortion, childcare, sexual harassment, rape, sexual discrimination, domestic violence, and feminism. While over 29% of the stories did contain some reference to a women's issue, there is no support for the hypothesis that women reporters will be more likely to report on themes typically identified as relevant to women and children than men reporters (See Table 3).

Table 3

Reporter Gender * Is there a reference to a women's issue? Crosstabulation

			Is there a reference to a women's issue?		
			Yes	No	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	30	77	107
		% within Reporter Gender	28.0%	72.0%	100.0%
	Male	Count	69	163	232
		% within Reporter Gender	29.7%	70.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	99	240	339
		% within Reporter Gender	29.2%	70.8%	100.0%

Phi = -.017   Approx. Sig. = .748

In fact, in this population of stories, male reporters were slightly more inclined to include a reference to a women's issue, although the similarity of the male and female reporters' percentages is striking.

Hypothesis 2. Women reporters will be more likely to include female sources in their stories than men reporters.

There were 1,772 sources cited in the 339 coded stories, representing an average of about five sources per story (M = 5.23). About 57% (1018 stories) of these were official sources with the remaining 43% falling into the other political party, expert, interest group, or regular citizen categories. About 20% (357) of the total sources were female sources, with an average of about one female source per story (M = 1.05). However, a crosstabulation shows that in over half of the stories, no female sources appear, regardless of the gender of the reporter (See Table 4).

Table 4

Reporter Gender * Number of Female Sources Crosstabulation

			Number of Female Sources			
			No female sources	One female source	Two or more female sources	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	54	26	27	107
		% within Reporter Gender	50.5%	24.3%	25.2%	100.0%
	Male	Count	120	71	41	232
		% within Reporter Gender	51.7%	30.6%	17.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	174	97	68	339
		% within Reporter Gender	51.3%	28.6%	20.1%	100.0%

Cramer's V = .096 Approx. Sig. = .209

This also shows only minimal support for the hypothesis that women reporters will be more likely to include female sources in their stories than men reporters, with only a 1.2 percentage

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point difference. In fact, male reporters in this study were more likely to cite one female source, but female reporters were more likely to cite two or more female sources. Female sources were originally coded based on the total appearing in the story, but were recoded as none, one, or two or more for ease of comparison in the crosstabulation.

Hypothesis 3. Women reporters will be more likely to include regular people as sources than men reporters.

In this study, regular citizens were cited as sources 311 times, representing about 18% of the total sources. The majority (80.6%) of these regular citizens were used as sources in a total of 31 stories in which the main story topic was voters' views or opinions. This reflects an emphasis by *The New York Times* on highlighting the views of regular citizens in their 1996 Election coverage. The crosstabulation does not support the hypothesis that women reporters will be more likely to include regular people as sources than men reporters because there is only a 2.2 percentage point difference based on gender (See Table 5).

Table 5

Reporter Gender * Regular Citizens as Sources Crosstabulation

			Regular Citizens as Sources			
			None Cited	1 Cited	2 or More Cited	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	84	6	17	107
		% within Reporter Gender	78.5%	5.6%	15.9%	100.0%
	Male	Count	177	20	35	232
		% within Reporter Gender	76.3%	8.6%	15.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	261	26	52	339
		% within Reporter Gender	77.0%	7.7%	15.3%	100.0%

Cramer's V = .053 Approx. Sig. = .624

The data also indicate that women reporters are slightly more likely to include two or more regular sources in their stories than men but that difference is only 0.8% and not large enough to signify any real difference. It should also be noted that men reporters wrote 74% of the stories in which voters' views or opinions was the main topic, so it seems surprising that men didn't rely more on regular citizens as sources.

Hypothesis 4. Women reporters will be more likely to use gender-relevant frames than men reporters.

As noted earlier, gender-neutral is defined as labeling, categorizing, or describing people or issues with no reference to being male/female. Gender-relevant does include a specific reference to being male/female, including references which are gender specific by definition, such as wife, mother, daughter, matronly, etc. for women or husband, father, son, patronly, etc. for men. Each story was coded as gender-neutral; gender-relevant, but the story **only** includes a reference to a person's spouse as "his wife" or "her husband; or gender-relevant in any other context. This coding eliminated simple spousal references from the gender-relevant category under study. As shown in Table 6, gender-relevant frames not including the spousal references were noted in 113 (33.3%) stories. However, there is no real support for the hypothesis that women reporters will be more likely to use gender-relevant frames than men reporters, with only 0.4% separating the two categories. Here again, the similarity in all of the percentages shown in this crosstabulation is striking.

Hypothesis 5. Women reporters will be more likely to reference the importance of the women's vote than men reporters.

There was a direct reference to the value or importance of the women's vote in the 1996

Election in 47 (13.9%) stories, with no such reference in the other 292 (86.1%) stories. When this direct reference did occur, women reporters were somewhat more likely than men reporters to make such a reference (See Table 7).

Table 6

Reporter Gender * Is the frame gender-neutral or gender-relevant? Crosstabulation

			Is the frame gender-neutral or gender-relevant?			
			Gender-neutral	Gender-relevant, only a spouse mention	Gender-relevant in any other context	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	60	11	36	107
		% within Reporter Gender	56.1%	10.3%	33.6%	100.0%
	Male	Count	129	26	77	232
		% within Reporter Gender	55.6%	11.2%	33.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	189	37	113	339
		% within Reporter Gender	55.8%	10.9%	33.3%	100.0%

Cramer's V = .014 Approx. Sig. = .968

Table 7

Reporter Gender * Is the importance of the women's vote mentioned? Crosstabulation

			Is the importance of the women's vote mentioned?		
			Yes	No	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	18	89	107
		% within Reporter Gender	16.8%	83.2%	100.0%
	Male	Count	29	203	232
		% within Reporter Gender	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	47	292	339
		% within Reporter Gender	13.9%	86.1%	100.0%

Phi = .058 Approx. Sig. = .284

Although the difference is only 4.3 percentage points, there is some support for the hypothesis that women reporters will be more likely to reference the importance of the women's vote than men reporters.

Hypothesis 6. All reporters will be unlikely to reference the physical appearance of news sources and subjects, regardless of gender.

A comparison of the frequency distributions of references to the physical appearance of female or male sources shows that reporters made more references to the physical appearance or attire of Bill Clinton and Bob Dole than they did to other male sources or female sources, but references to physical appearance in any way were minimal (See Table 8). This does lend support to the hypothesis that all reporters will be unlikely to reference the physical appearance of news sources and subjects, regardless of gender. It also indicates that the journalists in this study have moved beyond the trend noted in past research of describing women sources or subjects primarily in terms of their appearance or attire.

Table 8

Female source - Reference to physical appearance or attire?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	27	8.0	8.0	8.0
	No	312	92.0	92.0	100.0
	Total	339	100.0	100.0	
Total		339	100.0		

Male source - Reference to physical appearance or attire?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, about Clinton or Dole	42	12.4	12.4	12.4
	Yes, a male source not Clinton or Dole	19	5.6	5.6	18.0
	Yes, both Clinton or Dole AND a male source	7	2.1	2.1	20.1
	No	271	79.9	79.9	100.0
	Total	339	100.0	100.0	
Total		339	100.0		

Interestingly, crosstabulations show that the women reporters in this population of stories were more likely to include references to both the physical appearance or attire of women (See

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Table 9) and the physical appearance or attire of men (See Table 10).

Table 9

Reporter Gender * Female source - Reference to physical appearance or attire? Crosstabulation

			Female source - Reference to physical appearance or attire?		
			Yes	No	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	14	93	107
		% within Reporter Gender	13.1%	86.9%	100.0%
	Male	Count	13	219	232
		% within Reporter Gender	5.6%	94.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	27	312	339
		% within Reporter Gender	8.0%	92.0%	100.0%

Phi = .128   Approx. Sig. = .018

Table 10

Reporter Gender * Male source - Reference to physical appearance or attire? Crosstabulation

			Male source - Reference to physical appearance or attire?				
			Yes, about either Clinton or Dole	Yes, a male source other than Clinton or Dole	Yes, both Clinton or Dole AND another male source	No	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	16	5	3	83	107
		% within Reporter Gender	15.0%	4.7%	2.8%	77.6%	100.0%
	Male	Count	26	14	4	188	232
		% within Reporter Gender	11.2%	6.0%	1.7%	81.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	42	19	7	271	339
		% within Reporter Gender	12.4%	5.6%	2.1%	79.9%	100.0%

Cramer's V = .069   Approx. Sig. = .661

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Hypothesis 7. All reporters will be unlikely to reference the familial or marital status of the male candidates.

A comparison of the frequency distributions shows that reporters referenced the familial or marital status of either Bill Clinton or Bob Dole in less than 10% of their stories (See Table 11). This supports the hypothesis that all reporters will be unlikely to reference the familial or marital status of the male candidates, which was based on trends in prior research which showed that women candidates were more likely to be referred to as wife, mother, daughter, while male candidates were usually referred to in terms of their education, occupation, or professional qualities.

Interestingly, many of the references to Bill Clinton or Bob Dole's familial or marital status in this study occurred in stories about the campaign efforts of their wives to appeal to women voters. For example, on August, 14, 1996, *Times* reporter Carey Goldberg (1996) covered a campaign appearance by Dole's wife, Elizabeth, and daughter, Robin. The reporter wrote that Elizabeth Dole "radiated supportive warmth today" in her "Oprah-like visit with three San Diego women deemed worthy of praise." The reporter also highlighted Mrs. Dole's dual image:

> The chat on overstuffed furniture at San Diego's Indoor Sports Club provided a prime opportunity for Mrs. Dole to demonstrate her Feminist-Lite approach, combining her good-girl sunniness with no-nonsense career advice and statements of Mr. Dole's policy.
>
> Mrs. Dole's schedule during the four days of the Republican National Convention appears engineered to paint her as the spouse-who-is-nothing-like-Hillary, keeping her largely in a world of women and spotlighting her helpmate role rather than her other identity as a political heavyweight. The two Dole women also stitched advertisements for Dole policies seamlessly into the girl talk.

Here we see an entire story with a gender-relevant frame that emphasizes Bob Dole's familial

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and marital status.

Table 11

Is Clinton's familial or marital status referenced?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	32	9.4	9.4	9.4
	No	307	90.6	90.6	100.0
	Total	339	100.0	100.0	
Total		339	100.0		

Is Dole's familial or marital status referenced?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	24	7.1	7.1	7.1
	No	315	92.9	92.9	100.0
	Total	339	100.0	100.0	
Total		339	100.0		

As shown in Table 11, reporters were slightly more inclined to reference Bill Clinton's familial or martial status, but the difference is less than two percentage points.

A crosstabulation shows that women reporters in this population of stories were more likely to reference the familial and marital status of Bob Dole than men reporters (See Table 12),

Table 12

Reporter Gender * Is Dole's familial or marital status referenced? Crosstabulation

			Is Dole's familial or marital status referenced?		Total
			Yes	No	
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	11	96	107
		% within Reporter Gender	10.3%	89.7%	100.0%
	Male	Count	13	219	232
		% within Reporter Gender	5.6%	94.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	315	339
		% within Reporter Gender	7.1%	92.9%	100.0%

Phi = .085 Approx. Sig. = .119

but because there is such a small number of stories that include these references, this difference could simply be due to a few women's stories emphasizing Dole's wife as the "unknown" would-be-First Lady, in contrast to Hillary Clinton who has been the focus of media attention for several years as First Lady. A similar crosstabulation shows that men and women reporters were virtually the same on references to the familial and marital status of Bill Clinton (See Table 13).

Table 13

Reporter Gender * Is Clinton's familial or marital status referenced? Crosstabulation

			Is Clinton's familial or marital status referenced?		
			Yes	No	Total
Reporter Gender	Female	Count	10	97	107
		% within Reporter Gender	9.3%	90.7%	100.0%
	Male	Count	22	210	232
		% within Reporter Gender	9.5%	90.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	32	307	339
		% within Reporter Gender	9.4%	90.6%	100.0%

Phi = -.002 Approx. Sig. .968

Conclusions

As noted above, there is almost no support for the first four hypotheses that predict women reporters will be more likely to report on themes typically identified as relevant to women and children, will be more likely to include female sources and regular people as sources, and will be more likely to use gender-relevant frames than their male colleagues. In fact, the crosstabulations show a striking similarity between the percentages when reporter gender is taken into account in this population of *New York Times* 1996 Presidential Election stories.

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If we think about gender studies of journalists and news coverage in terms of a normative model, following Jennings (1988), we can see in this study how certain journalistic factors highlight convergence, such as newsroom socialization, the structure of news work, and the traditions of journalism which emphasize balance and objectivity. This convergence seems particularly strong for the journalists from *The New York Times* represented in this content analysis and provides support for the argument that media routines and organizational level influences are so strong that they result in story writing conformity within newsrooms and minimize the effect of individual characteristics of journalists, including gender. The "elite" organization created by Adolf S. Ochs, who systematically excluded women from the newsroom, appears to have perpetuated a great deal of story writing conformity, at least in terms of the gender issues covered in the first four hypotheses mentioned above.

In the final three hypotheses, there is a hint of evidence suggesting that the gender of the journalist, an individual characteristic, has an impact. In terms of references to the importance of the women's vote in the 1996 Election, women reporters were somewhat more likely to mention the value of the women's vote than men reporters, but with less than 14% of total stories including such a reference, the impact seems negligible. On the one hand, this message can be seen as empowering to women and could encourage their participation in the political process. On the other hand, one could question whether 47 stories out of a total of 339 is an accurate news media representation if "gender is one of the primary fault-lines running through contemporary American politics" as Norris (1997, p. 1) contends.

Additionally, an examination of embedded themes in some of these stories seems to include mixed messages for women. On August 29, 1996, *Times* reporter Adam Nagourney's

(1996) story focuses on the importance of the women's vote in the 1996 election. Women are seen as the swing voters that Clinton has and Dole needs to win the election. Nagourney writes:

> Both camps believe that the election will ultimately be decided by the women's vote, and what is being attempted here now, said Celina Lake, a Democratic pollster, is to transform the gender gap "into a gender canyon -- and put the race out of range".
>
> Linda DiVall, a Republican pollster who is an expert on women's issues..., said that Republicans would argue that all the programs that the White House is pushing represent the kind of government intervention that many voters, regardless of gender, have come to associate with the Democrats.
>
> "Republicans need to do a better job of closing the gap with women," Ms. DiVall said. "Democrats are continuing to bank on the fact that if they have a 20 percent advantage with women, they will win the election". (p. 1)

Nagourney's story provides a straight-forward message about the importance of the women's vote based on percentages attributed to pollsters.

On October 6, 1996, *Times* reporter Carey Goldberg (1996) writes a story referencing suburban "soccer moms." The lead asks, "If the catch phrase that emerged from the Republican sweep in the 1994 elections was 'angry white men,' then what will it be this election season?" Goldberg then provides some possible answers:

> "Anxious white women," suggested Karen Hasse Ball, a mother of two who lives with her husband, children, dog, and two cats on a leafy street in this Los Angeles suburb and casts her vote based on concerns about her children's future.
>
> In fact, the white suburban women like Ms. Hasse Ball who are fast becoming the most sought-after voters of the campaign season are already known in campaign circles by a different name that is only now gaining currency: soccer moms.
>
> "The breakaway moms also reflect the mounting political independence of women who have been out in the workplace for many years," said Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster. Her suggestion for the 1996 catch phrase was "energized white women" because "they're not particularly angry but they are empowered". (p. 1)

Here, the message of empowerment for women is overt.

In contrast, on October 20, 1996, *Times* reporter Neil MacFarquhar (1996) writes about the soccer dads and questions the image of the soccer mom. He points out that, statistically, there are not enough soccer players with moms to constitute a major voting bloc. But he adds that "pollsters and demographers find the term useful as a catch-all for suburban women, most married and working at least part-time outside the home, with children under 18 -- even if it distorts the role mothers perform in their children's athletic lives" (p. 1). MacFarquhar quotes only one "expert" on gender politics in the story:

> Some experts on gender politics, however, believe that the state of a woman's marriage exerts stronger influence over her voting pattern than how she spends time with her children.
>
> "Soccer mom is a bad label," said Warren T. Farrell, author of *The Myth of Male Power*. "A better label would be the Potentially Rejected Moms or the 'First Wives' Moms. When she begins to fear the end of her marriage or it does end, she begins to look to the government to become a substitute husband. The Democrats play the role of the government as substitute husband better than the Republicans." (p. 1)

This message can be seen as marginalizing because women are seen as the left-over part of a flawed married couple, which in some way relates to their increased political involvement. This marginalization of women is, in effect, supported by the male reporter because this is the only "expert" on gender politics quoted or referenced in a 1207-word story.

It should also be noted that stereotypical images of men can also be found embedded in stories. In an August 30, 1996, Francis X. Clines (1996) *Times* article on the mood of Democratic delegates after the resignation of presidential advisor Dick Morris, there are several male gender-relevant frames. Clines writes:

> "Don't ask me -- it's a male thing," one female delegate declared furiously at midday as word of Mr. Morris's sudden resignation swept through the delegate caucuses.
>
> "If this were the first time that anything had emerged from this Presidency, it would be different," said Debbie Wasserman Schultz, a 29-year old state legislator from Florida. "But one more thing doesn't matter. I think a lot of people will say, 'Well, boys will be boys'." (p. 1)

Clines refers to Clinton's survival after accusations of marital infidelity in 1992 and writes, "But the same sense of deja vu also seemed to hit hard in this particular convention, where 53 percent of the delegates were women and the platform was strongly pro-feminist" (p. 1).

Although this was not a qualitative study, these examples do provide a glimpse of pressures that work toward divergence, such as mixed messages about women's involvement in the political process, the paucity of women used as news sources, regardless of whether the journalist is male or female, and the fact that women reporters are less likely to have bylines on page one. Also, despite the fact that 20 years has passed since the settlement of the sex discrimination class action lawsuit against *The New York Times*, the number of women reporters (32%) covering this election still fell far short of the 50% mark of women represented in the general population.

This study is encouraging in some ways because there was strong support for the final two hypotheses that all reporters will be unlikely to reference the physical appearance or attire of news sources and subjects and will be unlikely to refer to the familial or marital status of the candidates. This shows that journalists from *The New York Times* were not likely to rely on simple sex stereotypes when covering the 1996 Presidential Election. It seems clear that future research should continue to examine news media content for gender factors as a way to improve the overall quality of the news, and that frame analysis as a method seems promising. As noted by Jolliffe (1989), "It is hoped that consciousness of gender differentiation of women -- and attempts to avoid it -- may lead to correction of gender differentiation for men and women" (p. 691).

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[Report issued via the Internet at: http://www.mediastudies.org/women.html]

Appendix A

Coding Scheme for New York Times Study

1. Item Number 3 cols (1-3)

2. Month of story 1 col (4)
    - 1=August
    - 2=September
    - 3=October
    - 4=November

3. Day of story 2 cols (5,6)

4. Location of story 1 col (7)
    - 1=Page 1
    - 2=Inside
    - 3=Business
    - 4=Lifestyle or Entertainment
    - 5=Other

5. Length of story 1 col (8)
    - 1=Under 500 words
    - 2=501 - 1000 words
    - 3=1001 - 1500 words
    - 4=1501 - 2000 words
    - 5=2001 words and over

6. Is the reporter named first a 1 col (9)
    - 1=Woman
    - 3=Man

7. If there is a second reporter, identify their sex 1 col (10)
    - 1=Woman
    - 3=Man
    - 9=Not applicable

8. Number of sources consulted in the story 1 col (11, 12)
    (Do not include a reporter acting as the source of information, and include only sources identified by name)

9. Number of female sources consulted in the story 1 col (13,14)

10. Enter the **number** of sources identified as
    - 1=a candidate, public officeholder, government official, or a spokesperson for a candidate 1 col (15,16)
    - 2=a political party representative not listed in #1 above, including political convention delegates 1 col (17,18)
    - 3=an expert, political analyst, or news media personnel 1 col (19)
    - 4=affiliated with an interest group, a lobbyist, or a business, corporate, or industry spokesperson 1 col (20)
    - 5=regular or typical citizen 1 col (21, 22)

11. What political party is mentioned 1 col (23)
    - 1= Democratic
    - 2= Republican
    - 3=Both Democratic and Republican
    - 4= Other, including multiple party mentions
    - 9= None

12. Main topic 2 cols (24,25)
    - 01= Health, health care, environment, education
    - 02= Religion, school prayer
    - 03= Economic growth, budget deficit, taxes, corporate downsizing, business
    - 04= Welfare, Social Security, immigration
    - 05= Race, gender, affirmative action, age, gay and lesbian rights
    - 06= Abortion
    - 07= Crime, gun control, domestic violence, illegal drug use, smoking
    - 08= Defense, military, foreign policy, terrorism
    - 09= Trade, labor, agriculture
    - 10= Candidate qualifications, poll standings, political strategies, campaign tactics, campaign finance
    - 11= Voters' views or opinions
    - 12= Other

13. Secondary Topic, if applicable 2 cols (26,27)
    - (Use categories from #12 above)
    - 99=None

14. Does any story include a reference to a women's issue? 1 col (28)

    (A women's issue is defined as an issue that primarily affects females in society, such as reproductive health, family planning, abortion, childcare, sexual harassment, rape, sexual discrimination, domestic violence, feminism)

    - 1=Yes
    - 3=No

15. Is any frame gender-neutral or gender-relevant?

(**Gender-neutral** is defined as labeling, categorizing, or describing people or issues with no reference to being male/female. **Gender-relevant** is defined as labeling, categorizing, or describing people or issues with a specific reference to being male/female. This would include references which are gender specific by definition, such as wife, mother, daughter, matronly, etc. for women or husband, father, son, patronly etc. for men)

[Examples:
#3 Gender-relevant frame, but the story **only** includes a reference to a person's spouse as "his wife" or "her husband":
Reporter states in a sentence about Jack Kemp, "and backed by the even firmer position of his wife, Joanne"
Reporter states in a sentence about Bill Clinton, "along with his wife, Hillary"
#5 Gender-relevant frame in any other context:
Reporter quotes Colin Powell directly, "I believe in a woman's right to choose and I strongly support affirmative action," he said.
Reporter states, "Haley Barbour, the party chairman, made no secret of the Republicans' effort tonight to appeal to women, who in recent elections have favored the Democrats by a larger margin than men."

1= Gender-neutral 1 col (29)
3= Gender-relevant, but the entire story includes **ONLY** a reference to a person's spouse as "his wife" or "her husband."
5=Gender-relevant in any other context

16. Does the story contain a direct reference to the value or importance of the **women's vote** in the 1996 Election?

1=Yes 1 col (30)
3=No

17. Does the reporter make a reference to the physical appearance or attire of a **female** source or subject referenced in the story? 1 col (31)
1=Yes
3=No

18. Does the reporter make a reference to the physical appearance
or attire of a **male** source or subject referenced in the story? 1 col (32)
1=Yes, about either candidate, Clinton or Dole
3=Yes, about a male source or subject other than Clinton or Dole
5=Yes, about both a candidate AND a male source or subject other than Clinton & Dole
7=No

19. Does the reporter make a reference to Bill Clinton's **familial or marital status**?
(Familial or marital status includes references to his being married, being a husband, father, son, etc.)

1=Yes 1 col (33)
3=No

20. Does the reporter make a reference to Bob Dole's **familial or marital status**?
(Familial or marital status includes references to his being married, being a husband, father, son, etc.)

1=Yes 1 col (34)
3=No

THE QUEST FOR CREDIBILITY THROUGH THE PUBLIC DIALOGUE IN CORRECTION BOXES, LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND COLUMNS WRITTEN BY NEWSPAPER OMBUDSMEN

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The Quest for Newspaper Credibility Through the Public Dialogue in Correction Boxes, Letters to the Editor and Columns Written by Newspaper Ombudsmen

The news media have a credibility problem that has caused journalists to face increasing public skepticism about their motivation and power. The public often perceives the news media to be arrogant, insensitive and out of touch with the prevailing values in society. Even some journalists believe that the news media have failed to provide an adequate forum for the public to express its discontent about media behavior.[1]

Edward L. Seaton, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) and editor of the Manhattan, Kan., *Mercury* recently commented that " . . . the public views us as overtly sensational, often inaccurate, disrespectful, biased and unable to explain ourselves."[2] A 1998 ASNE-sponsored study of newspaper credibility concluded that newspaper audiences feel disconnected from journalists.[3]

Related to credibility is the concept of accountability, which is a newspaper's obligation to explain or justify its behavior to such external constituencies as readers or sources of information.[4] Providing a public accounting of its behavior may enhance a newspaper's credibility because it shows the newspaper's willingness to respond to the public's concerns about its behavior.

Historically, newspaper readers who wanted to comment about a newspaper's behavior could write letters to the editor. Publishing letters to the editor helps enhance a newspaper's credibility because it allows the public to comment on the paper's behavior[5] and to express alternative views to those published in the newspaper. However, a letter to the editor does not always prompt a newspaper to publicly respond to the concern raised about the paper's behavior.

As for a public assessment of a newspaper's accuracy, many newspapers publish corrections,[6] believing them to be essential to enhancing a paper's reputation for accuracy.[7] Yet the shortcomings of correction boxes is that the paper seldom does anything more than correct an error. The reader comment that prompted the correction is not presented.

Some newspapers employ an ombudsman whose job includes soliciting reader comment about the paper's behavior. Many ombudsmen discuss these reader comments in a column published in their newspaper.[8] One advantage of the ombudsman's column is that it often shows both the reader's concern about the newspaper's behavior and the newspaper's response to that concern.

This paper examines how newspapers published in two cities with competitive daily newspapers used correction boxes, letters to the editor and an ombudsman's column as part of their public dialogue with readers about the paper's behavior. In both cities, Denver and Washington, D.C., one newspaper employed an ombudsman while the competing newspaper did not.[9]

We sought to assess how the newspapers used these functions as mechanisms of accountability and to determine if having an ombudsman made a difference in how the newspapers responded to reader comment about the paper's performance. We also wanted to determine what role the ombudsman plays in the public dialogue about the newspaper's performance.

One reason that newspapers give for employing an ombudsman is to enhance their responsiveness to the public.[10] By examining letters to the editor, correction boxes and ombudsman columns, we sought to examine the degree to which the four newspapers that we studied used these functions to publicly "connect" with their readers.

Background

The concept of an ombudsman began with the Swedish parliament's decision in 1809 to create a "citizen's protector" as a check against unfair administrative decisions rendered by the government.[11] The ombudsman movement began in the American newspaper industry in 1967 after media critic Ben H. Bagdikian and A.H. Raskin, then an assistant editorial page editor at *The New York Times*, suggested in separate essays that newspapers should appoint an ombudsman.[12] Newspapers often cite a desire to reverse declining public confidence in the press as a principal reason for appointing an ombudsman.[13]

The number of news ombudsmen has grown to about 31 in the United States and about 54 worldwide.[14]

Media scholars have examined the slow acceptance of the ombudsman concept by newspapers,[15] differences in how the position developed,[16] how ombudsmen influence the attitudes of journalists,[17] the ombudsman's role in resolving disputes with readers,[18] the ombudsman's role in monitoring election coverage,[19] the views of ombudsmen about controversial reporting practices,[20] acceptance of the position by staff members,[21] and by the public.[22]

Various articles have examined whether ombudsmen represent their newspaper or the public[23] and instances when ombudsmen have clashed with the management of their newspapers.[24] Recent work has found that ombudsmen play a public relations role[25] and an accountability role.[26]

Although several studies have described the perceptions of editors[27] and readers[28] on the value of editorial pages, only a few studies have focused on the role of letters to the editor.[29] Hynds, and Ericson, *et.al.* observed that letters to the editor attract readers and enhance a newspaper's credibility, while providing a forum for exchange of ideas and information.[30] Ericson, *et.al.* observed that news sources consider letters to the editor effective at generating "more balance in a continuing story." But they were pessimistic about the ability of a writer of a letter to the editor to be effective because journalists still "have the last word."[31] Nonetheless, Hynds argued that letters to the editor serve as a safety valve for people who are dissatisfied about some aspect of community life, including the behavior of the press.[32]

Although newspaper accuracy has been a subject of scholarly study since the early days of mass media research,[33] sustained scholarly interest in reader perception of error has coincided with the rise of the newspaper ombudsman movement.[34] Various studies have sought to explain how competition could affect accuracy,[35] the public's perception of the accuracy of newspapers,[36] how sources of information evaluate perceived errors,[37] the tendency to correct factual mistakes rather than "subjective infractions,"[38] the perceived ineffectiveness of corrections in rectifying mistakes,[39] and newspapers' willingness and speediness in publishing corrections.[40] Newspapers' general willingness to correct factual errors may contribute to a higher level of public credibility than that enjoyed by broadcasters.[41]

An individual's status can influence a person's ability to lodge complaints and obtain redress.[42] Not surprisingly, those of higher public status, including business and political leaders, tend to seek corrections more often.[43] Frequent letters to the editor writers tend to be business executives and professionals.[44] Contacting an ombudsman to complain about a newspaper's behavior may work best for those with less frequent contact with news organizations.[45]

The December 1998 release of the findings of the ASNE journalism credibility study has provided more evidence that newspapers are suffering from a credibility gap with their readers. Among the major findings of the ASNE study were:

- The public believes that newspapers contain too many factual, spelling and grammar errors.
- Newspapers fail to consistently demonstrate respect for or knowledge of their readers and communities.
- Bias influences what stories are covered and how they are covered.
- Newsroom values and practices sometimes are in conflict with readers' own priorities for their newspapers.
- The public believes that newspapers seek out and over-cover sensational stories because they are exciting and sell newspapers.
- Those who have had experiences with the news process were the most critical of media credibility.[46]

These views were similar to those found in a 1985 ASNE study of newspaper credibility.[47] The 1985 study found that the public was critical of newspaper coverage of ordinary people, concerned about a lack of accuracy in news stories, and confused about the separation of fact and opinion. As in the 1998 study, many in the 1985 survey believed that the biases of journalists influenced news coverage.[48]

Research Questions and Method

One of our research questions was what is the role that published letters to the editor and correction boxes play in the public discussion about the newspaper's performance. Because letters to the editor and correction boxes are among the most visible of a newspaper's efforts to be accountable to the public, we wanted to examine the degree to which the four newspapers in our study used them as part of their public dialogue about the paper's performance.

Although none of the four newspapers indicated in their correction boxes which errors were corrected as a result of complaints from the public as opposed to mistakes discovered by the staff, we believe it reasonable to think that most mistakes corrected in a correction box have the potential to upset one or more readers. By examining the errors corrected in the correction box, we sought to determine the types of errors the newspapers corrected and the status of the party likely to have been offended by the newspaper's mistake.

We also wanted to examine whether the presence of an ombudsman resulted in differences in how newspapers respond to public concerns about the paper's behavior. Therefore, another of our research questions was whether a newspaper that appoints an ombudsman would be more responsive to public concerns about the paper's behavior and thus more willing to discuss those concerns. We asked this because the appointment of an ombudsman opens a channel of communication that would not exist otherwise for the public to discuss the paper's behavior. Newspapers that give their ombudsman a mandate to publicly criticize the newspaper may be more willing to create and maintain a public discussion about the paper's behavior.

It may be, though, that at a newspaper with an ombudsman, complaints and comments that otherwise would be channeled to the letters to the editor column or show up in a correction box might be dealt with in the ombudsman's column. Therefore, another research question we asked was what is the manner in which the ombudsman responds to public comment about the paper's behavior. Did the ombudsmen in our study use their public columns as a vehicle for engaging in critical review of the paper's behavior or was the ombudsman's column a second form of a letters to the editor column and/or a correction box?

We conducted a content analysis of all letters to the editor and correction boxes published in the *Denver Post* the

(Denver) *Rocky Mountain News*, the *Washington Times* and *The Washington Post* during 1997. We also analyzed all ombudsman columns published in *The Washington Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News* during 1997.

We coded all published correction boxes because correction boxes always involve the newspaper's behavior.[49] However, we coded only those published letters to the editor in which the author was writing in response to a specific instance of the behavior of the newspaper in which the letter was published.[50] Usually the letter writer was commenting in response to a particular news story, commentary or editorial.[51]

In the ombudsman columns, we coded each topic within the column in which the ombudsman discussed a specific concern about the newspaper's behavior. However, we only coded topics in which the ombudsman made a specific reference to the topic having been raised by one or more readers during the course of communication between the ombudsman and the paper's readers.[52]

We developed a coding sheet based on that used by Barkin and Levy in their study of newspaper correction boxes.[53] The coding sheet was used to classify the nature of the reader comment about the newspaper's behavior and to record the status of the party affected by the newspaper's behavior in question. We defined objective error as factual mistakes, or mechanical mistakes of typography or transmission. We defined subjective error as mistakes of interpretation or judgment.[54]

To determine the status of the likely affected party of letters to the editor authors and those whose comments were mentioned in the ombudsman columns, we relied on identifying labels published in the column or the letter to the editor. In the case of the latter, the newspapers sometimes publish a title or editor's note identifying the writer in some manner. In other instances, the writer identified himself or herself in the text of the letter. When the writer's status could not be determined, we coded the status of the likely affected party as unknown.

Identifying the status of the likely affected party to an error corrected in a correction box was a challenge because none of the newspapers indicated who had demanded a correction of error. Therefore, we considered the nature of the story in which the error occurred and used that to determine the status of the likely affected party. In cases where that could not be done, we coded the likely affected party as unknown.

Findings

We initially coded the correction boxes, published letters to the editor and ombudsman columns by determining if the newspaper's behavior in question concerned news content, editorials or commentaries.[55] More than 90 percent of corrected errors in the correction boxes of all four newspapers involved news content. Similarly, more than 90 percent of reader comments discussed by ombudsmen at *The Washington Post* and *The Rocky Mountain News* involved news content. Reader comment about editorials showed the greatest variation, ranging between 8.4 percent for the *Washington Times* to 14 percent in the *Denver Post*.

Table 1 Goes Here

A more detailed analysis showed that the newspapers primarily used correction boxes to correct objective errors rather than subjective errors. At all four newspapers, the most often corrected errors involved, in descending order, wrong explanations, wrong names and wrong numbers. This is reasonably consistent with the findings of studies of newspaper accuracy conducted in the 1980s.[56] Although earlier newspaper accuracy studies found that "wrong description" was the leading type of objective error corrected, it may be that the differences lie in the fine difference in the definition of "wrong description" and "wrong explanation."[57] Correction boxes published by both Washington newspapers addressed objective error more than 90 percent of the time. By contrast, both Denver newspapers corrected objective errors at a somewhat reduced rate.

At all four newspapers, the published letters to the editor in which the author sought to correct a perceived newspaper error tended to address subjective concerns. Letters that corrected objective errors tended to involve what the letter writer perceived as a wrong explanation by the newspaper.

Far more frequently, though, the published letters to the editor expounded upon the author's view on a particular public issue raised in a news story, editorial or commentary. Often, the letter writer also expressed disagreement with the views of others, including those who wrote for the newspaper and the authors of other published letters to the editor.

A slightly higher percentage of the letters to the editor published by the *Rocky Mountain News* created a dialogue of sorts among letters to the editor writers. This finding may be explained by the existence of a series of mini-debates among readers about the hazards of automobile travel in the Denver area, the influx of non-natives to Colorado and the role of homosexuality in religious life.

These mini-debates had their impetus in the newspaper's reporting of significant issues, including stories about transportation problems in the Denver area that resulted in a referendum on a proposal to build a light rail mass transit system. Also prompting reader comment were news stories about the quality of life in the greater Denver area and the decision of the Southern Baptist Church to boycott entertainment products offered by the Walt Disney Co. Church leaders believed that

Disney was endorsing anti-Christian values under the guise of providing family entertainment. The debates among letter writers stretched over several months.

The ombudsmen for *The Washington Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News* differed somewhat in the reader concerns that they addressed in their columns. Nearly half of the topics of reader concern addressed by *Rocky Mountain News* Reader's Representative Jean Otto involved objective errors made by the *News*, most notably wrong explanations, and typographical and spelling mistakes.[58]

By contrast, less than a third of the reader concerns that *Washington Post* ombudsman Geneva Overholser addressed in her column pertained to objective errors made by the *Post.* We coded as "miscellaneous" a number of errors pointed out by readers to the ombudsman. The majority of these situations, which included both subjective and objective errors, involved readers who questioned whether a writer's word choice was proper.

Other issues raised by readers that we coded as "miscellaneous" included praise for the newspaper, discussion of changes made between editions of one day's newspaper, the use of 900 telephone numbers to distribute the answers to the newspaper's crossword puzzle, the proper use of the word "Anglo," the use of "shorthand" language that confused a reader, and the use of photographs that had been misfiled in the newspaper's library.

Table 2 Goes Here

The status of those who may have been affected by the errors corrected in the correction boxes, who wrote published letters to the editor and whose concerns were the subject of an ombudsman's column could not be ascertained in the majority of instances. Nonetheless, we discovered that errors in stories involving business executives and government officials dominated the correction boxes at all four newspapers. This finding is consistent with those of earlier studies of newspaper accuracy.[59]

Of the authors of published letters to the editor whose status we were able to identify, government officials and business executives dominated as well. Yet those writing on behalf of voluntary organizations, trade organizations and people who were personally affected by the newspaper's behavior contributed nearly as many published letters to the editor.

Professionals, academics, journalists, and representatives of trade associations were most likely to be identified in the ombudsman columns of the *Rocky Mountain News* and *The Washington Post*. However, the percentage of readers whose comments about the newspaper's behavior made their way into the ombudsman's column but whose status could not be identified was significantly higher than was the case with the correction boxes and published letters to the editor.

In summary, we found a fairly consistent pattern of reader contact with the newspaper concerning its behavior. News content dominated the correction boxes and ombudsman's columns. Reader reaction to the opinion of columnists or other letters to the editor writers represented a sizable, although not dominant, portion of the published letters to the editor that addressed the newspaper's behavior in some manner.

The correction boxes primarily corrected objective errors, mostly mistakes of wrong explanations, wrong names and wrong numbers. Subjective errors were most often "corrected" in letters to the editor. Many of these subjective errors involved readers who disagreed with the emphasis of a particular news story, editorial or commentary. Most of the time, the letter writer used the letter as a platform from which to espouse his or her views on a particular public issue.

The fact that the four newspapers tended to correct objective errors is consistent with Barkin and Levy's study of correction box practices at *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.*[60] Likewise, the tendency for subjective errors to be "corrected" in letters is consistent with Whitney's finding that editors tend to channel them to the letters to the editor column.[61]

About 5 percent of our coding decisions reflected the occurrence of a dialogue among letters to the editor writers, although this tendency was somewhat more frequent at the *Rocky Mountain News*. Nearly half of our coding decisions in the columns written by the reader's representative of the *Rocky Mountain News* involved the correction of objective errors, specifically wrong explanations, and typographical and spelling errors. The ombudsman for *The Washington Post* devoted only about a third of her columns to discussing these types of errors. Many of the concerns raised by readers with the ombudsmen and discussed in their columns were specific enough to merit classification as "miscellaneous."

Discussion

Our study examined and assessed the public channels of communication between newspapers and their readers in two cities in which there is daily newspaper competition and in which one newspaper employs an ombudsman while the other does not. We sought to determine whether the presence of an ombudsman expanded the dialogue between reader and newspaper.

The short answer to this question is that the presence of an ombudsman only marginally expanded the dialogue between the newspaper and its readers. We found that rather than consistently addressing a wide range of reader concerns about their newspaper's behavior, the ombudsmen in Denver and

Washington tended to focus on reader concerns pertaining to the kinds of objective errors that a newspaper might correct in its correction boxes.

An ombudsman's needs in writing a weekly column may mean there is motivation to highlight the most interesting and unusual comments received during the previous week about the newspaper's performance. The high number of reader concerns that we coded as "miscellaneous" suggests that reader concerns about the paper's behavior may defy the more traditional definitions of "error" used by researchers and members of the public.

To be sure, the ombudsmen at *The Washington Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News* used their columns to comment about the state of journalism generally and about various public events involving the newspaper. These commentaries may have helped to advance the public's understanding of journalistic practices and to enhance the newspaper's credibility with the public.

However, an ombudsman's greatest contribution may be in what he or she has to say about his or her newspaper and the answers the ombudsman obtains for readers in response to their complaints and comments about the newspaper's behavior. We believe that ombudsmen could play a more substantive role in advancing the public's understanding of journalistic practices and addressing the credibility gap between newspapers and readers if ombudsmen would focus more directly on the subjective "errors" detected by readers.

The tendency of the reader's representative of the *Rocky Mountain News* to use her column to correct such objective errors as wrong explanations and spelling mistakes is commendable. The 1998 ASNE credibility study found that most newspaper readers care very much about objective errors and feel better about a newspaper that corrects such mistakes.[62]

Yet the ASNE study also found that newspapers readers care just as much about such issues as objectivity, fairness and the impact that newspapers have on their communities.[63] These are issues that an ombudsman is well suited to address in his or her column. Yet our study of ombudsman columns published in the *Rocky Mountain News* and *The Washington Post* found that the ombudsmen seldom addressed reader concerns about these issues.[64]

We also examined the degree to which published letters to the editor represented a public dialogue about the newspaper's performance. The mini-dialogues on public issues that played out in the *Rocky Mountain News* along with the more limited give and take discussion that occurred in published letters to the editor of the other newspapers offers some evidence that the letters to the editor column is a viable forum for public discussion of public issues. Although these public debates may be a step ahead of traditional town hall debates of yesteryear, they are several steps behind the debates that occur on computer bulletin boards and chat rooms in cyberspace.

As a forum for an on going dialogue about a newspaper's behavior, the published letters to the editor seldom served this function. Many published letters were critical of the newspaper's behavior, but for the most part, the authors used their criticism of a news story, a commentary or an editorial as a jumping-off point to press their views about a matter of public concern. Most of the time the public issues discussed had already been reported and/or commented upon in the newspaper in which the letter to the editor was published. Seldom did the newspapers publish a letter in which the author was not commenting upon or raising an issue in response to a specific published news story, editorial or commentary.

This situation was particularly pronounced in the Washington newspapers. Because Washington is the seat of the federal government and many key policy makers probably read the Washington newspapers, it may be that many letters to the editor writers see getting a letter published in the *Post* or the *Times* as an opportunity to affect the policy-making process and/or influence public opinion.[65]

It also is noteworthy that business executives and government officials wrote a significant number of the published letters to the editor. Likewise, most of the errors corrected in the correction boxes involved stories in which the primary affected party was likely to have been a business executive or government official.

Business and government officials have vested interests in addressing perceived shortcomings in a newspaper's account of their activities. A business leader's interest is protecting the company's financial well-being. A government official's interest is building and maintaining public support. Because business and government leaders tend to have more direct contact with the media than others, it is not surprising that they also make wide use of letters to the editor columns and that correction boxes tend to correct errors that might displease them.

The high percentage of parties whose status we had to code as unknown made it difficult to judge what significant types of people commented to the newspaper about its behavior. Nonetheless, we found that academicians, professionals, trade associations and journalists were among the most identifiable parties whose comments about the newspaper's performance showed up in the ombudsman's columns. These groups may have less experience in dealing with the mass media than do business and government leaders. They may be more likely to need the services of a "complaint manager" to make their way through the complex organization of a metropolitan newspaper and to help them articulate their concerns.

The recent ASNE credibility study suggests that newspapers need to do a better job of reporting on issues concerning African-Americans, Latinos-Hispanics, conservatives, the poor and people who receive public assistance, and members of religious organizations.[66] A newspaper ombudsman may have a significant role to play in reaching out to people inside these groups who tend to lie outside of "officialdom." Ombudsmen could help them to become part of the public dialogue about the newspaper's performance and its role in the community. Doing this might help newspapers better address the kinds of credibility problems identified in the ASNE study. Such efforts could be the subject for future research by media scholars.

Despite these findings, our study has some limitations. A content study cannot explain why people do or do not contact a newspaper and ask that an error be corrected, why people write letters to the editor or why they contact an ombudsman to express their views about the newspaper's behavior. Nor were we in a position to assess the level of satisfaction that resulted because the newspaper published a letter to the editor or corrected an error. We could not determine the satisfaction of those whose comments about the newspaper's behavior the ombudsman singled out for discussion in her column. Surveys of those who write letters to the editor, those who ask that newspapers correct errors and those who contact the ombudsman are needed to answer this question. Likewise, observational studies of newspaper personnel who receive and process reader comment about the paper's behavior are needed to further clarify these issues.

A more comprehensive study of newspapers that employ an ombudsman could help to determine if the ombudsmen for the *Rocky Mountain News* and *The Washington Post* are typical or atypical among ombudsmen in how they go about selecting reader comment for inclusion in their columns. Similarly, a study that examines a wider range of newspapers is needed to determine if the manner in which the Denver and Washington newspapers correct errors and select letters to the editor for publication is typical or atypical.

Nonetheless, our study raises questions about the effectiveness of letters to the editor columns, correction boxes and ombudsman columns in adequately addressing the credibility concerns raised in the ASNE credibility study. What we saw was typical of traditional journalism whereby various points of view were presented and readers were left to decide what to think about the newspaper's behavior. Most of the time, the newspapers were silent on how and why an error had occurred. Criticism expressed in letters to the editor went unanswered. The ombudsmen mostly spent their time discussing objective errors.

This may have fulfilled the newspaper's role as a marketplace of ideas, but as mechanisms of accountability, it was less effective. The ASNE credibility study suggested that to narrow the credibility gap, newspapers and their readers must do more talking with each other. Our study suggests that the traditional mechanisms that newspapers use to establish and maintain this dialogue more often than not resulted in readers and newspapers talking past each other.

Underlying the credibility problem is the need for newspapers to be considered to be more accountable to the public. Readers in Denver and Washington who sought accountability from their newspapers got it some of the time, but not most of the time. The dimensions of the newspaper industry's credibility problems are complex and may take years to address. Yet we believe that in order to begin narrowing the credibility gap, newspapers need to do a better job of responding to the specific concerns of the public about the paper's behavior. This means doing taking a more active role in using the traditional forms of accountability to establish a dialogue with readers.

If the public perception is that the newspaper is not responding to the public's concerns or that the newspaper is not being candid in discussing its performance, even if by omission, then credibility cannot be enhanced and may, in fact, be compromised. By not responding to public concerns about its behavior, newspapers are defeating many of the primary reasons for encouraging public discussion of press behavior. If accountability is a prerequisite for reviving public confidence in newspapers, then the process of providing a more complete and truthful account of the newspaper's activities must begin and soon.

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[8] For results of a recent survey of how newspaper ombudsmen communicate with the public , see 1997 Survey of ONO Members, located at www5.infi.net/ono/survey.html

[9] We chose Denver and Washington for this study because we wanted to compare the performance of daily, independently owned newspapers that compete for readers in the same city. The cities also had to offer a situation where one newspaper employed an ombudsman and the other newspaper did not. We considered but ruled out including in our study cities such as Minneapolis-St. Paul and the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, where independently owned competing daily newspapers compete for many of the same readers and one paper employs an ombudsman while the other does not. We reasoned that although there may be considerable overlap of circulation, the competing newspapers in question serve separate urban cores. We also considered Boston, but ruled it out because during 1997 the duties of the ombudsman at the *Boston Globe* were redefined in such a way that he no longer published a column that addressed reader concerns about the paper's behavior.

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[49] All coding was done by the authors, both of who teach journalism skills courses. Both authors also worked as journalists for more than five years before becoming full-time journalism instructors. We achieved an intercoder reliability of 94 percent based on Holsti's formula. See, Ole R. Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

[50] We discovered that the vast majority of published letters to the editor fit these criteria.

[51] The reference to the newspaper's conduct had to be specific in order to be included in the study. We thus excluded letters that made reference to media coverage in general or behavior of another news organization. Although many letter writers made reference to a specific story, commentary or editorial, in many instances the editors of the editorial page added more specific identifying information including the date an item appeared in the paper and the section in which it appeared.

[52] We excluded from the study any topic that did not appear to have been originally raised by one or more readers.

[53] Barkin and Levy, *op. cit.* We did make a number of modifications to the coding scheme that they used. We combined the "emphasis" classifications because we found them confusing and ultimately unhelpful. We also added a category of "dialogue with other writers" in order to take into account that we were coding letters to the editor as well as correction boxes and we wanted to account that some letters to the editor are in response to previously published letters to the editor. We also changed "status of likely offended party" to "likely affected party" to reflect the fact that our study was broader than just dealing with corrections. Not all of the people who may be affected by or comment on the paper's behavior will be offended.

[54] Barkin and Levy, *op. cit.*; Berry, *op. cit.*

[55] We defined news content as all news and feature material. We defined editorials as the newspaper's statements of opinion published on the editorial page. We defined commentaries as personal opinion columns published throughout the newspaper. However, it appeared that most reader response regarding commentaries was triggered by commentaries published on the paper's opposite editorial (op. ed.) pages.

[56] Barkin and Levy, *op. cit.*; Whitney, *op. cit.*

[57] We defined a "wrong description" as an error in which the error in question involves a misstatement of properties, features or characteristics. A "wrong explanation" was defined as an incorrect statement of the process, sequence of events or their consequences.

[58] Although we have used the term ombudsman throughout this paper, the *Rocky Mountain News* refers to its ombudsman as a reader's representative. Whatever the title, the duties are the same as an ombudsman.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] Barkin and Levy, *op. cit.*

[61] Whitney, *op. cit.*.

[62] ASNE Journalism Credibility Project, Major Finding No. 1, *op. cit.*

[63] ASNE Journalism Credibility Project, Executive Summary, *op. cit.*

[64] In fairness, we should note that we were not in a position in this study to determine the degree to which reader comments and complaints about issues of objectivity, fairness and the newspaper's impact on the community were raised with the ombudsman by readers. This is not to say the ombudsmen in Denver and Washington never discussed these issues. However, we observed that much of the time when these issues were discussed it was in a larger context of how these issues affect journalism generally.

[65] Although we did not track the hometowns of the authors of the published letters to the editor, it was apparent that a significant number of authors of letters published in both Washington newspapers lived outside the circulation area of both papers. This likely reflects the limited role that both papers play as national newspapers. It is also noteworthy that a number of authors of letters to the editor of the *Washington Times* noted that paper's role as a conservative voice in Washington and as a conservative alternative to the "liberal" *Washington Post.*

[66] ASNE Journalism Credibility Project, *op. cit.*

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Table 1: Objective and Subjective Errors (in percentages)

	Rocky Mt. News			**Denver Post**		**Wash. Times**		**Wash. Post**		
	CXB	**LTE**	**Omb.**	**CXB**	**LTE**	**CXB**	**LTE**	**CXB**	**LTE**	**Omb.**
Objective Error Type										
Wrong Description	3.6	0	0.5	3.7	0	2.8	0.1	1.1	0.2	8.0
Wrong names	21.0	0	4.1	10.6	0.1	21.6	0.1	16.6	0.1	1.1
Wrong numbers	18.5	0	4.1	5.6	0.1	9.4	0.2	11.9	0.1	0
Wrong Explanation	27.2	2.0	11.3	33.6	1.5	35.0	8.5	38.5	4.7	2.2
Typos/spelling error	1.5	0	17.3	8.7	0.2	7.8	0.1	6.8	0	6.9
Wrong locations	3.1	0	0.5	5.6	0	2.8	0	3.2	0	0
Wrong times	11.8	0	0	8.1	0	0	0	1.0	0.1	0
Wrong titles	1.0	0	0	1.2	0	3.5	0	3.2	0	0
Wrong addresses	0	0	0	0	0	1.6	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	0.5	0	11.8	1.9	0	8.3	0.1	9.4	0.2	12.6
Subjective Error Type										
Omissions	10.8	2.3	6.3	17.4	3.1	2.0	2.6	3.5	4.8	13.8
Disagreement with emphasis	1.0	24.2	23.5	0.6	25.8	0	27.4	0.7	25.6	19.5
Misquotes	0	0.1	0	1.2	0	3.2	0.7	1.6	0.2	2.3
Misleading headlines	0	1.0	7.2	0.6	0.7	2.0	0.3	1.9	0.3	2.6
Story suggestions	0	0.1	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	0
Comments on public issues	0	53.7	4.2	0	60.0	0	50.0	0	53.3	0
Dialogue with other writers	0	12.7	0.5	0	6.2	0	6.4	0	7.7	3.4
Miscellaneous	0	3.9	8.2	1.2	2.3	0	3.5	0.6	2.5	27.6
Total percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N = Coding Decisions	**195**	**2,903**	**221**	**161**	**2,522**	**254**	**2,623**	**691**	**3,341**	**61**

Table 2: Status of Likely Affected Party (in percentages)

	Rocky Mt. News			Denver Post		Wash. Times		Wash. Post		
	CXB	**LTE**	**Omb.**	**CXB**	**LTE**	**CXB**	**LTE**	**CXB**	**LTE**	**Omb.**
Business leaders	21.5	1.1	0	21.7	1.2	13.8	1.3	13.6	2.1	0
Government officials	19.0	2.4	0	23.6	3.4	41.1	13.8	26.8	13.1	0
Event sponsors	13.9	0.1	0	12.5	0.1	1.2	0	9.1	0.2	0
Professionals	1.0	2.1	1.5	3.7	2.7	2.8	2.0	3.1	1.8	1.5
Voluntary organizations	5.1	4.6	0	2.5	2.1	0.4	0.4	0.4	1.0	0
Celebrities	0	0	0	0.6	0	2.8	0.1	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	3.1	1.8	0.5	1.9	2.5	8.3	10.9	11.1	5.0	0
Personally affected	0.5	2.3	0	5.6	0.8	6.3	0.6	7.6	2.6	0
Trade association	0.5	2.1	0	1.2	1.7	2.8	21.8	3.0	11.2	1.5
Entertainment industry	0	0.1	0	0.6	0.1	0.8	0.1	3.9	0.1	0
Associates of deceased	1.0	0.1	0	0	0	2.0	0	0.7	0.1	0
Persons in legal Proceedings	6.2	0.2	0	5.6	0.2	1.6	0.1	2.4	0.1	0
Academics	0	1.6	0.5	0	2.2	4.3	2.6	4.4	2.7	1.5
Journalists	1.0	0.4	0	4.4	0.2	3.2	0.7	2.1	0.8	3.0
Unknown	27.2	81.1	97.5	16.1	82.8	8.6	45.6	11.8	59.2	92.5
Total percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N = Number of Cases	**195**	**1,598**	**204**	**161**	**1,684**	**253**	**1,373**	**669**	**1,867**	**67**

THE METRO WIDE WEB:

How Newspapers' Gatekeeping Role Is Changing Online

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ABSTRACT

THE METRO WIDE WEB:
How Newspapers' Gatekeeping Role Is Changing Online

Newspapers traditionally have brought selected information about the world to local readers' doorsteps. But as papers go online, their editors face new decisions relating to that gatekeeping role. This study examines the print and online versions of six Colorado newspapers, comparing the amount of local and non-local news, sports and business content in each. The findings indicate the online products have a much stronger local orientation than the print ones, suggesting that online papers may be moving toward abandonment of the role of connecting readers to a world that extends beyond their horizons.

THE METRO WIDE WEB:
How Newspapers' Gatekeeping Role Is Changing Online

It's hardly news that the World Wide Web presents newspapers with innumerable challenges to their traditional roles. After five-plus years in this online venue, publishers and editors continue to wrestle with issues of content, staffing, revenue generation and a host of related concerns. One persistently perplexing issue has been how to balance two of the Web's more striking attributes -- which happen to present diametrically opposite alternatives for a news organization. On the one hand, the Web is the first truly global medium; content can be disseminated to millions of people in all corners of the globe instantly and without any incremental increase over the cost of sending it electronically around a more literal corner. Yet at the same time, the Web is the ultimate niche medium. Because it has no physical limits, it can serve the narrowest of interests, the tiniest of territories. Among the millions of people using the Web, it is likely that no two use it in exactly the same way.

A print newspaper, of course, is somewhere between a universal medium and a personal one. Just where it lies on that continuum depends on its mission, its market and its resources; *The New York Times* serves an international community, while a rural daily may reach only a few thousand people. But regardless of their size or scope, all newspapers share the role of gatekeeper to the world for their readers. All newspapers present a selection of the day's events, along with other items deemed of interest.

That compilation consists of a mix of information from both inside and outside the paper's local circulation area. Each day's newspaper provides a concrete and finite world view, a view that takes in both the proximate and the distant. It is a package that inherently recognizes that the place we live -- the place inhabited by local readers of our product -- is part of a set of larger places that includes our state, our region, our nation and, ultimately, our entire planet. Though it serves a community primarily defined by geography, one of the print newspaper's key roles is to connect that geographic community to the rest of the world.

This paper examines how that role is changing as newspapers move online. It suggests that although the physical distribution of the paper's content has suddenly been freed from all geographic constraints, the online paper's world view is, in fact, far more narrowly focused than that of its print counterpart. The findings indicate that the online paper, at least in these early years, is an overwhelmingly local medium serving a specific community of place. As such, it is giving up a major portion of its traditional gatekeeping function. Providing a link to "ap.org,"the online version of the Associated Press, is quite a different thing from selecting which wire stories are of such significance or interest that they merit inclusion in the day's paper. This study suggests that as papers move online, Mr. Gates may find himself out of a job.

GATEKEEPER TO A POST-MODERN WORLD?

Mr. Gates, of course, is the eponymous 1940s wire editor whose job it was to choose which wire stories were to be published and which got the spike. While his decisions were subjective, they were based on a set of criteria which, when pressed, he was able to at least nebulously define; some stories were simply "not interesting," others were "too vague" or perhaps they were just plain "slop" (White, 1950, 386). Building on sociologist Kurt Lewin's proposal that a person or group with some power decides what passes through the "gate" and is thus able to become a part of general knowledge, White suggested that Mr. Gates relied heavily on his own value judgments for making those decisions. Still, make them he did, choosing about 10 percent of the thousands of state, national and international wire stories that crossed his desk each week as worthy to be passed along to readers of his 30,000-circulation Midwestern newspaper (White, 1950).

Subsequent studies have confirmed both the subjectivity of the gatekeeper's decisions and the readily observable fact that such decisions are made daily by professionals working in a medium of finite space. During the Vietnam War, an older Mr. Gates, still highlighting national and international stories through his subjective daily decisions, defined news as a day-by-day report that "should be presented as much as possible in variety for a balanced diet" (Snider, 1967, 426). Other studies have sought to probe more deeply into criteria for news selection in a variety of ways. For instance, Chang and Lee (1992) suggested that perceived impact on American security and national interest was a major factor in the selection of international news for inclusion in U.S. dailies. In a different sort of study, Wanta and Roark (1992/1993) verified that gatekeeping decisions are reflected in wire photos as well as text; which photos actually made it into the paper was based on a mix of market size and perceived audience needs, newspaper tradition and national trends, as well as news events themselves.

In print newspapers, the use of wire and other non-local items seems to be thriving. Although some recent journalistic trends, notably the growth of civic journalism, have stressed the primacy of the local community, studies indicate the print paper is not becoming significantly more "local" in its orientation. Bridges and Bridges (1997) suggest a rather mechanistic approach to selecting news could help explain the fact that front pages, "the reader's window to the tone and the 'spirit' of a newspaper ... are not demonstrating an interest in the local environment" to the degree the researchers expected. They found that timeliness of news seemed more important than proximity, a rather interesting approach for newspapers to take at a time when they have become among the slowest of delivery mechanisms for breaking news. Nor are small newspapers, which serve a geographically concentrated audience, more likely than large ones to focus exclusively on news of those communities. Voakes et al. (1996) found that medium and small news organizations have a much larger percentage of wire copy on issues of statewide interest than larger outlets. And although people may turn to newspapers for local news first, national, international and state news are all also in the top six among content category preferences for readers of all ages (Stone and Boudreau, 1995).

Although the Web in general can be a dubious source for trustworthy information, users do seem willing to turn to online newspapers for non-local stories of importance to them. A survey of politically interested Web users during the 1996 presidential elections indicates that they see online newspapers as significantly more credible sources of this information than their print counterparts

(Johnson and Kaye, 1998). In an earlier study of college students' use of the Mercury Center, an America Online version of the *San Jose Mercury News*, Mueller and Kamerer (1995) found that a majority of respondents actually preferred the "electronic" newspaper to a traditional one as a source of world, national, sports and business news.

Although online newspapers are beginning to provide increasing amounts of original content (see Middleberg and Ross, 1999; Outing, 1999), the fact remains that the bulk of the news content online is still "shovelware" -- content that was created for the print product and has simply been shoveled on the Web or, to use the more polite term, "repurposed" for online distribution. For example, at two newspapers observed by Martin (1998), stories were typically moved from the newspaper production computers to the online staff for the markup needed for Web delivery. Other content changes were rare and relatively minor, such as changing headlines to fit the different space requirements, although the online staffs did occasionally develop special content sections not available in print. The majority of an online newspaper's content, then, might be expected to simply replicate the print product.

This study seeks to explore whether online papers do, in fact, reflect the content mix selected by gatekeepers at their print counterparts to provide readers with information from around the world, or whether they are giving their online readers a different view of the world than they are giving their print ones. Specifically, it posed this research question: Is the online newspaper's overall news, sports and business content more or less "local" in its emphasis, defined as involving the paper's immediate circulation area, than that of its print counterpart?

METHODOLOGY

This study involved a content analysis of six newspapers located along Colorado's "Front Range." This region east of the Rocky Mountains is experiencing phenomenally fast population growth, as is the state as a whole. Through much of the 1990s, for example, the county just south of

Denver was the fastest-growing in the nation; with some relief, local media recently reported it has lost that distinction and is now only the **second**-fastest-growing, shooting up 11.2 percent from 1997 to 1998 alone (Blevins, 1999), 133 percent since 1990. U.S. Census figures indicate Front Range counties all have grown significantly in the past decade, contributing the major impetus to a statewide population growth of 20.5 percent since 1990. And the trend is expected to continue; Colorado had about 3.3 million residents in 1990, will hit 4 million by the end of this year and is projected to be home to 5.2 million people by 2025 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999).

Clearly, it is a part of the country whose communities are undergoing rapid change. Area newspapers thus face the challenge of serving a readership comprised of relatively large numbers of newcomers, whose local attachments may not run deep. (And not only because they have not lived there long. Research indicates that in areas of high population density, people are less likely to stay caught up with local news and more likely to be somewhat estranged from their community; see Rothenbuhler et al., 1996).

The newspapers used in this study were the print and online versions of the Boulder *Daily Camera*, the Colorado Springs *Gazette*, the *Denver Post*, the *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, the Loveland *Reporter-Herald* and the Pueblo *Chieftain*. These papers were selected for a variety of reasons in addition to their location in this Front Range area of rapid growth:

* They have an online product that includes news updated daily.

* They represent each of the Newspaper Association of America's four circulation categories; the *Reporter-Herald* and *Camera* have a circulation below 50,000; the *Chieftain* is between 50,000 and 100,000; the *Gazette* is between 100,000 and 250,000; and the *Post* and *News* are over 250,000 (Bacon's, 1998).

* Several of the papers have overlapping circulation areas and are, to varying degrees, in competition with one another, raising interesting issues of what constitutes local news. The most direct competition is between the *Post* and the *News*; Denver is one of the

> few remaining U.S. cities with two unaffiliated competing papers, and the circulation war has been red hot throughout the decade (see Shepard, 1995). However, both papers also circulate all up and down the Front Range and are readily and cheaply available in each of the four other cities whose primary newspaper is included in this study. In addition, the Boulder and Loveland papers' circulation areas overlap, as do those of the Colorado Springs and Pueblo papers. So several papers serve common areas and must seek to differentiate themselves from competitors in their markets.

A composite week in June 1998 was used to conduct the content analysis, with specific days randomly selected to construct the composite. Use of such a "constructed week" in content analysis is preferable to both simple random sampling of stories (because of the likelihood of oversampling from larger editions, such as the Sunday paper) and use of consecutive days in a single week (because those results are harder to generalize over time) (Riffe et al., 1993).

Both the print and online versions of each of the six newspapers were coded on each of the seven days of this composite week. The analysis included all current-day stories in the news, sports and business sections, both print and online; it omitted lifestyles, other feature sections (such as travel or entertainment) and weather (although weather-related stories that ran in the news sections were counted), as well as all advertising content. Material that ran solely as agate (for instance, stock tables or Major League Baseball standings) was not counted; standalone artwork, however, was counted. Even with the limitations, the story count quickly added up. In all, 3,403 print stories and 1,383 online items were included in the study.

The author coded each story according to a variety of criteria, including its length in paragraphs; its placement on a page or site; and its inclusion of elements ranging from infoboxes to e-mail addresses. Of primary importance for the purposes of this paper, however, are the following criteria:

* Which newspaper and which version of that newspaper (print or online) it appeared in (for example, "online *Post*" or "print *Camera*"). Each paper had its own code in the data collection and preliminary analysis stage; for some of the subsequent data analysis, an aggregation of the six online papers and the six print papers was helpful.

* Whether it was a news, sports or business story. In some cases, a story that appeared in one section of the print product appeared in a different section online; if so, it was coded according to where it ran in each product. For example, a story about Broncos quarterback John Elway's car dealership providing college scholarship funds for local teens was a news item in the print *News* but a sports story online.

* Whether it was a metro story (about something in the paper's core circulation area); a state story (in the state but outside the paper's core circulation area); a regional story (in any of the seven states bordering Colorado); a national story (in a non-bordering state or a nationwide story, such as announcement of a new medical breakthrough); or a world story (in any country other than the United States). Some stories had dual natures; for instance, stories about the Denver trial of Oklahoma City bombing suspect Terry Nichols were simultaneously metro and regional stories for two Denver papers, and both state and regional stories for the others. These were coded in a way that acknowledged both "locations." In particular, collections of briefs, coded as a single story, often reflected multiple locations. For subsequent data analysis, an aggregate variable was created to allow examination of "metro" and "all non-metro" stories.

* Whether it was written or photographed by a staff member, a non-staff member (for instance, a local businessman's financial column or a story by a staffer at another Colorado paper owned by the same company), an Associated Press staffer, or a staffer at a syndicated service other than the AP, such as *The New York Times*. Codes also were assigned for multiple bylines (for instance, "staff and wire reports").

* Whether the story appeared in the print product only, in the online product only, or in both the print and online products. In some cases, parts of a story (for instance, one brief in a collection of briefs) might appear in both products while other parts did not; in other cases, a different version of a print story might appear online. Both such cases were accommodated in the coding.

* Whether it had artwork. If so, the type of artwork (photo, infographic, cartoon and so on) was coded, as was the source (staff, non-staff, AP or syndicate), whether it was color or black and white, and how it was used (for instance, with a story, standalone or as a refer). If multiple pieces of art were used, that was also noted.

It should be mentioned that the challenges posed by online content analysis are numerous -- too numerous to discuss in detail here. They include the transience of the medium and the resulting problems in testing for either reliability or validity of coded materials; the wide variation in the way stories are presented and accessed online, making consistency of coding hard to obtain; and the fact that because the medium is rooted in neither time nor space, there may be no clear indication where one "edition" ends and another begins. For example, the extensive use of archives, with or without dates on the actual stories, makes it tough to ascertain which stories belong with which day's paper. In short, for a method whose reliability and thus credibility rest primarily on the fact that the content itself is stable and the classification of it is reproducible (Weber, 1990), the Web can be a bear.

In this study, a single researcher did all of the coding, both print and online, herself. Obviously, that eliminated problems of intercoder reliability. However, intracoder reliability remains an issue, particularly for the online product where, again, standard reliability tests are difficult because the product changes daily if not hourly. An intracoder reliability test was conducted with the print newspapers by recoding a news section, a sports section and a business section from three different days in three different papers. A total of 66 stories were recoded. All stories recorded the first time were also recorded the second time. The coding for all categories relevant to this paper was the same both times.

After the coding was completed and a coding sheet created, a total of 20 variables were identified and numeric values assigned; again, not all are relevant to this paper. The data related to all 4,786 coded print and online stories were then entered into SPSS and analyzed. The variables of greatest interest here consisted of nominal data, so their analysis was conducted primarily through frequency calculations and selected cross-tabulations.

FINDINGS

This section looks at the content analysis findings related to the raw numbers of stories in each of the two media; the location and content of those stories; the staffing of the stories; and the use of artwork.

Story totals, print and online

For starters, the print products of the six newspapers combined ran well over twice as many news, sports and business items as the online versions (see **Table 1**). Overall, 1,383 such items appeared online during this composite week, compared with 3,403 in the print products for the same days. So despite the unlimited news hole available online, editors of Web products are whittling down the print package for online distribution. Just how much whittling takes place varies with the newspaper. The Boulder paper, which runs house ads urging readers to check its Web site for "the full content of today's *Camera*," did provide the greatest number of online stories relative to its print counterpart, with 279 online stories during the composite week and 509 print ones. At the other extreme, the smallest paper of the group, the Loveland *Reporter-Herald*, ran just 82 stories online during the week and 382 in print.

Of the 1,383 news, sports and business stories that ran online, just 158, or 11.4 percent, appeared **only** in the online product and not in print. Many of these were stories from "ap.org," the online version of the Associated Press; for example, the *Denver Post*, which includes links to current AP stories on its home page, had 69 of the online-only stories, of which 67 were ap.org items. (The *Post*, which had an online editorial staff of only two full-time people at the time of this study, occasionally got into trouble with these links when editors failed to update the menu text to reflect the latest AP story. An example was in sports coverage of both World Cup soccer and Wimbledon tennis matches; the *Post*'s menu text was apt to refer to results from games earlier than those the AP was moving copy on.) The 158 online-only stories also included the occasional failure to keep a Web site updated, so that online stories were actually from a previous, uncoded edition of the print paper.

No evidence of locally produced content created solely for the Web site in any of these three news-oriented categories was encountered among the papers in this study. True, some papers do have archives of ongoing stories. Some also offer special content packages online that are not available in print; an example is the *Gazette*'s "Colorado Online" sister site, primarily a travel and recreation guide. And some provide discussion boards on various topics; an example here is the *Post*'s "Voice of the Fan" option from its sports menus. But while these are interesting and potentially useful applications of the Web's capabilities, they are standing features, not special content created to tell a particular news, sports or business story online.

The same version of 1,149 stories ran in **both** the print and online products of the papers in this study. They typically ran with no changes or with only minor alterations, such as a different headline to fit the available space or the inclusion of a paragraph or two online that got cut from the print version. Another 62 stories appeared both in print and online, but in different versions; for example, an AP story online might correspond to the *Washington Post* syndicate's coverage of the same event in print. And a handful of stories, notably collections of briefs, overlapped only partially.

On the other hand, 2,173 stories -- 45.4 percent of all the news, sports and business stories coded -- appeared **only** in print. Looking at these stories in more detail brings us closer to answering a research question concerning the "localness" of the two products.

Story location and content

Of the 1,383 total stories that ran online, 617 (44.6 percent) were metro items. Among the 3,403 total print stories, 1,051 (30.9 percent) were metro (see **Table 2**), a significant difference ($X^2(1)=81.628, p <.001$). An even more dramatic statement can be made by looking at the stories that ran **only** in the print products and did not appear online at all; of these, a whopping 78.5 percent were from outside the paper's primary circulation area. Of the stories that ran in **both** the print and online products, 582 (47.4 percent) were metro items. What these figures indicate is that although the online products do contain a mix of local and non-local stories, they are not reflecting the full range of news, sports and business content available in print -- and where they are diverging is primarily over the provision of non-local stories.

The data for all 4,786 stories can be broken down further by content category as follows. (Odd numbers appear in the "both" column because of the collections of briefs; for example, one set of briefs in print might have included two separate online stories.)

	Print only	**Online only**	**Both**	**Totals**
Metro News	267	17	653	937
Metro Sports	110	16	321	447
Metro Business	89	4	187	280
Non-Metro News	922	65	736	1,723
Non-Metro Sports	559	42	359	960
Non-Metro Business	224	14	191	429
Metro Other *	1	0	3	4
Non-Metro Other *	1	0	5	6
Totals	2,173	158	2,455	4,786

* These are stories incorporated in a news, sports or business section in one medium but in a feature section in the other.

This breakdown shows that while the majority of metro news, sports and business stories appearing in print were picked up for the online version, a majority of the non-metro ones in each category were not. (Again, many non-metro online-only news stories were "ap.org" items.) In all three categories, the amount of non-metro content appearing in print exceeds that appearing online.

Looking at the news, sports and business items individually also offers insight into the relative importance given to each category in the print and online products. Overall, considering both products together, roughly twice as many news stories ran in this composite week as sports stories, and roughly twice as many sports as business stories ran; the totals were 2,660 (55.6 percent of the total) for news, 1,407 (29.4 percent) for sports and 709 (14.8 percent) for business. The percentages are comparable when the online and print products are considered separately (see **Table 3**).

However, the weight given to these topics online varied among the six newspapers. The two Denver papers placed considerably more weight on sports -- the most entertainment-oriented of the three content areas -- in their online products. Sports has consistently been a high usage category for both Denver online papers since their launch within months of each other in 1995, and they clearly are attentive to those figures. The *Post* ran 144 sports stories online and 149 news stories, compared with 273 sports and 416 news stories in print. The *News* actually ran more sports stories (107) than news stories (100) online; in print, it ran 211 sports stories and 388 news ones.

Both papers gave relatively short shrift to business stories online, with 37 appearing in the online *News* and 64 in the online *Post* (compared with 150 and 125, respectively, in print). In contrast, several online papers gave business items more play online. The Pueblo *Chieftain* ran 99 sports stories and 45 business stories in print; online, it ran almost as many business items (15) as sports ones (17). Similarly, the Boulder *Camera* ran 34 business and 51 sports stories online, compared with 77 business and 173 sports items in print. With the exception of the online *News*, all the papers in this study ran more news stories than items in either of the other two categories.

Story staffing

Given that Mr. Gates was a wire and not a city editor, perhaps an even better way to look at the gatekeeping issues relevant to this study is to look beyond the location of the story to the staffing of that story. Some stories that took place outside the paper's primary circulation area were still covered by staffers. Examples included staff coverage by both the *News* and the *Post* of the NBA and

NHL finals (in which no Denver teams even came close to being involved), as well as staff coverage by the larger papers of a cop-killing and subsequent manhunt in the Four Corners area, at the other end of the state and across two mountain ranges from their primary circulation areas.

Overall, 2,037 (42.6 percent) of the total 4,786 print and online stories were covered by staffers either alone or in combination with a non-staff source, typically a wire service. Another 453 stories had no byline of any sort, and on seven, the author neglected to record a byline. Of the remaining 2,289 stories, 1,623 (70.9 percent) were provided by the Associated Press, either alone or in combination with another wire service, or simply had a generic "wire services" byline. Another 496 were from a non-AP wire or syndicate, such as the *New York Times* syndicate or Scripps-Howard News Service (Scripps owns both the *News* and the *Camera*), and 170 were from "non-staff" sources such as area business or sports personalities.

However, when online and print stories are considered separately, the relationships look quite different. The online content was predominantly staff-generated. Among the online stories, 818 (59.1 percent) were by staffers, either alone or in combination with a wire service report; among the print stories, 1,219 (35.8 percent) were by staffers. This difference between staffing of print and online stories also is highly significant ($X^2(1)=222.722, p <.001$).

Part of the reason for this, of course, is economic; copy from the print staffers is essentially free to the online product while everything else carries a fee. The Associated Press is not cheap in print, and it's not cheap online, either; for example, the Colorado Springs *Gazette*, with a circulation slightly over 100,000, pays roughly $900 a month for the right to use "ap.org" in its online service (G. Greene, personal communication, March 17, 1999). One of these six papers, the *Chieftain*, appeared not to have paid to use any wire copy; it simply never did. However, the other five did not take extensive advantage of that right, either.

Artwork

Although the use of artwork -- photographs, infographics, sigs or logos and so on -- is not the primary focus of this report, it is worth noting some visual differences between the print and online products. Not only does artwork serve to grab attention and draw a reader into a story, it also is material that must be selected for inclusion just as a text story is, as Wanta and Roark (1992/1993) pointed out. More important, a photograph or infographic tells a story in its own right, and is worth inclusion in any discussion of the relative emphasis given to particular types of newspaper content.

As other researchers are beginning to document, despite the Web's multimedia capabilities, online newspapers are far less visually enticing than their print counterparts, at least in terms of information-conveying graphics. Technological limitations are at least a partial excuse; pictures do take longer to display online and the resolution is not as good as in print. Whatever the reasons, the relative absence of substantive artwork among the online papers studied here is striking.

Altogether, 1,886, or just under 40 percent, of all the stories included in this study had one or more pieces of art associated with them. In fact, 206 of those stories were told solely by a photograph or infographic; these "standalone" graphics were included in the story count. Staff artists or photographers provided the artwork for 666 stories and a wire or syndicate provided 518. The rest of the artwork came either from non-staffers (for instance, family photos provided by a source); from multiple sources (for instance, a staff photo accompanying a story that included an AP infographic); or had no credit line (for instance, mug shots). Artwork accompanied both local and non-local stories, of course. Among all the "illustrated" stories in this study, 658 had a local flavor; that figure includes 88 standalone pieces of local art.

However, when online and print products are considered separately, the differences are again dramatic. Of the 3,403 print items, 1634 (48 percent) had some accompanying art, ranging from a single sig or mug shot to a multi-photo package. Of the nearly 1,400 online stories, only 252 (just over 18 percent) had any art at all, either on the menu, accompanying the story or as standalone art, another highly significant difference ($X^2(1)=362.375, p <.001$). And even that relatively low figure is inflated by the fact that so many of the online stories were actually "ap.org" items, many of whichcontained one or more color AP photographs. As described above, there were 158 online-only stories -- and 43 of those (27.2 percent) had artwork.

Given the findings related to stories in general, it is no surprise that a greater proportion of the art online was likely to be local in nature than the art in print. Of those 252 online stories with art, 100 (39.7 percent) had local art. Of the 1,634 print stories with art, 558 (34.1 percent) had local art. Although this difference is not as significant ($X^2(1)=2.943, p <.1$) as some of the other findings, it should be remembered that, again, the use of art online is skewed by the links to "ap.org" stories, none of which were local and many of which had accompanying photos.

A final reminder before drawing some conclusions: These data were collected in June 1998. The papers discussed here have continued to improve, expand and revamp their online products since then; obviously, like their colleagues across the nation, they all are in the midst of a learning process about what works and what doesn't. However, their local online emphasis remains strong today.

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that these newspapers serve rapidly growing communities of people whose interests are likely to range farther afield than the immediate metropolitan area, and despite the global nature of the medium itself as a "diaspora ... wherein new social groupings are formed and organized" (Carey, 1998, 34), the papers studied here are primarily local products. The findings indicate that although the online versions draw most of their material from the print product, they do not take everything; the content they include is likely to be local, and the content they leave behind is likely to be non-local. The research question, asking whether the online paper's content is more or less "local" than that of is print counterpart can be answered in one word: more. And reports from the trade press, professional conferences and newsrooms around the country indicate that although the audience in Colorado may have unusually shallow community roots, the local emphasis of these six papers is very much the norm nationwide.

Certainly, that makes a great deal of sense in many ways. The Web gives readers access to literally millions of sources of information both broad and narrow; the one thing a local newspaper knows, arguably better than anyone else among those millions, is its own market. Particularly for newspapers whose circulation areas overlap, as those along the Front Range do, stressing expertise in the immediate community is one of the best ways to differentiate one's own product from those of competitors. In general, for publishers scratching their heads over what they can offer that will be unique enough to attract both reader and commercial interest, local information is an obvious choice.

By providing it, they have an excellent opportunity not only to serve their existing audience but to attract new users from outside their circulation area. When British nanny Louise Woodward was on trial for murder in Massachusetts, the Newton paper's Web site seized its opportunity to be a key source of updates for people around the world; the Laramie, Wyoming, paper missed its chance to build its brand name and image (and to boost the number of hits it could have then pitched to local advertisers) by offering only scant coverage of the murder of a local gay student, a story that attracted global interest and media attention (Outing, 1998). Local information remains the core franchise of a local newspaper. Failing to provide it online, even enhance it with supplemental local content, would be not just silly but irresponsible.

It also is true that online newspapers have limited staffs and, until profits become more widespread, limited resources. As of early 1998, just a few months before the present study was conducted, the average staff size at papers with circulations under 50,000, such as those in Boulder and Loveland, was a grand total of one; even much larger papers were typically struggling to maintain a "24/7" product with fewer than half a dozen very overworked people (Singer et al., 1998). Obviously, some priorities must be chosen, and local content may well be the one thing the online newspaper cannot fail to include if it is going to include any news at all.

Journalists' willingness to abandon their traditional gatekeeping responsibilities may stem not only from economic and staffing constraints, and not only from a reconsideration of their fundamental franchise. It may also be evolving out of the recognition that the Web offers the ultimate, so far, post-modern medium; each user can, and does, create in essence a "Daily Me" (see Harper, 1997) consisting of items important to him or her. And that personalized world view is right at the user's fingertips, in the same medium in which the online newspaper also exists. Unlike the print newspaper, the Web is not a finite, concrete media form; instead, its form is simultaneously fluid and global and supremely individualistic.

Further exploration of the "why" behind the "what" journalists are choosing to include online is an obvious follow-up to this study, but the decisions do seem defensible and even logical. However, those choices also pose a danger. As they wrestle with what their role is in the online world and how to address it, journalists may be giving up one of their most important jobs. In a world as tightly interconnected and interdependent as ours has become, we are poorly served by a myopic view of the place we live. It may be true, as former House Speaker Tip O'Neill is reputed to have said, that all politics is local. But we will not understand how we are affected locally if we do not understand how we are affected regionally, nationally and, in the truly global society that is rapidly constructing itself, internationally. For a newspaper to assume that we will take it upon ourselves to seek and find that information elsewhere is, to some extent, an abrogation of its own responsibility to bring the world to our doorstep, be it virtual or physical.

We do not exist in isolation, and we do not exist only through our personal interests. We exist as members of a real community that extends well beyond our newspaper's primary circulation area. We have always relied on our newspaper to remind us of that. If the newspaper no longer does so, it will have relinquished one of its most vital roles: connecting its readers to the broader world.

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Table 1: Number of online and print stories (News, sports and business)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Online papers	1383	28.9	28.9	28.9
	Print papers	3403	71.1	71.1	100.0
	Total	4786	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Metro and non-metro stories, online and print

		Metro or non-metro		
		Metro	Non-metro	Total
Online or print newspaper	Online papers	617	766	1383
	Print papers	1051	2352	3403
Total		1668	3118	4786

$X^2(1)=81.628$, $p < .001$

Table 3: News, sports and business stories, online and print

		Section of newspaper				
		News	Sports	Business	Other	Total
Online or print newspaper	Online papers	772	400	210	1	1383
	Print papers	1888	1007	499	9	3403
Total		2660	1407	709	10	4786

"You Had to Be There" (And They Weren't):

The Problem with Reporter Reconstructions

Russell Frank

Pennsylvania State University

AEJMC Newspaper Division
"Honing My JOURNALISM?"
Wed, 11:30-12:45

Russell Frank
Assistant Professor
College of Communications
The Pennsylvania State University
106 Carnegie Building
University Park, PA 16802-5100

Running head: "YOU HAD TO BE THERE"

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Newspaper stories that rely on the reconstruction of events from police reports, court records and the recollections of witnesses often sacrifice attribution for the sake of immediacy. Such stories make compelling reading but they mislead readers by erasing the line between information obtained via observation and information obtained from human or documentary sources. This paper argues that the lack of attribution is more distracting than its presence – because the reader wonders how the reporter knows what he knows – and calls on reporters to make clear when they have left the realm of observation and entered the realm of reconstruction.

You Had to Be There (And They Weren't):

The Problem with Reporter Reconstructions

You owe the reader an attribution.

Don Fry [1]

The 1997 edition of the Poynter Institute's annual compendium of *Best Newspaper Writing* includes a story by AP reporter Julia Prodis about three teen-agers who stole a car and made a suicide pact that resulted in the death of two of them.

As "Dying for Love" gets under way we are with the three teens in their stolen Grand Prix, "rocketing faster that 100 mph" down an Arkansas highway (Prodis, 1997, p. 78). A trooper's car is closing in. A truck is blocking the way. The chase is over.

"Josh cocked the gun, turned to Jenny and looked deep into her green eyes" (Prodis, 1997, p. 78).

Suddenly, at the moment of greatest suspense, I'm distracted. Hey, wait a minute, I say to myself. The reporter wasn't in the car with them. How does she know he looked deep into her green eyes?

In *Best Newspaper Writing*, Prodis (1997a) provides the answer in a "Lessons Learned" essay that follows the story. There we learn that she pieced together what happened on that Arkansas highway from listening to Jenny's remarkably detailed tape-recorded interview with the police. Ah, but readers of the newspapers in which Prodis' story appeared would not have seen the essay that Prodis wrote for the book.

True, says AP enterprise editor Bruce DeSilva, who edited Prodis' original story, but the newspaper version was topped by an editor's note explaining where the information came from (personal communication, November 6, 1998). In a phone interview, Prodis, now with the *San Jose Mercury News*, confirmed that her story ran with an editor's note, and when asked specifically about Josh's gazing into Jenny's eyes, she assured me that she herself was amazed at Jenny's recall on the tape (personal communication, November 1998).

The bafflement I experienced while reading the version of Prodis' story without the editor's note recurs every time I read a story in which scenes that could not have been witnessed by the reporter play a prominent role. At *The Oregonian*, writing coach Jack Hart calls such stories "reconstructive narratives " (*The Oregonian*, 1998, p. 1). At the *Providence Journal*, says former staffer Christopher Scanlan, "reconstruction was the term we used to use … in the 1980s to describe stories that tried to recreate newsworthy and usually dramatic events for our readers" (personal communication, September 7, 1998). Scanlan now edits the *Best Newspaper Writing* series, which regularly includes prize-winning features like Prodis' that have reconstructions at their core.

Most of these stories are powerhouses. The drama, suspense and dialogue that make the best short fiction so compelling are heightened by our understanding that "all this really happened." The problem with them is that instead of telling the reader where they got their facts, the reporters who reconstruct scenes rely on another trick of the fabulist's trade, the omniscient narrator. Without such familiar signposts as "police said," or "according to court records, " the reader loses his bearings. He wanders off in search of the reporter, only to discover that, unlike Waldo in the popular children's picture-book series, the reporter is not in the picture at all. At that point, he begins to doubt: If the reporter was not there, how does she know all this? The more detailed the reconstruction, ironically, the more the reader has grounds to suspect that the reporter embellished the facts for the sake of a good yarn.

This article will address three questions regarding the ethical implications of reconstructive narratives: Are reconstructions fabrications? Should reconstruction be regarded as a deceptive practice on a par with television news magazine re-enactments or staged photographs? Does labeling a reconstructive narrative as such in an editor's note go far enough in allaying reader uncertainty about what the writer is up to?

Breaking the Frame

Every reconstruction seems to contain one detail so minute that I cannot imagine how a source would have deemed it worth mentioning. In "Dying for Love" it is the depth of Josh's gaze into Jenny's green eyes. In *Washington Post* reporter Laura Blumenfeld's "A Death in the Cold," it is a hand gripping a banister. The hand belongs to George McGovern. He has just learned of his daughter's death by alcoholism.

The story begins in the alley in Madison, Wis., where Teresa McGovern's body was found. There is dialogue between the two men who found her in the snow and a detailed description of their actions and of Teresa McGovern's appearance.

The scene shifts to the Washington, D.C., home of George and Eleanor McGovern. No dialogue this time, but a detailed account of what McGovern was doing before the doorbell rang, and a detailed account of how he reacted when police officers broke the bad news.

Thus far, I am filled with admiration, even envy, when I consider all the questions Blumenfeld must have asked to get all this information. I completely believe that people can remember in almost photographic detail the moments when they found a body or were confronted with news of a loved one's death and I believe that a good reporter can draw those memories out. Doubt creeps in when I get to this paragraph:

> He had to tell Eleanor. But how? He forced himself to climb the stairs to their bedroom, a hand on the rail, gripped by a thought so cold it numbed him to his fingers:
>
> In all his life, this was the moment of his greatest defeat (Blumenfeld, 1995).

Did McGovern specifically remember his hand on the rail, or is this a literary riff, a metaphorization of the thought's grip on McGovern's consciousness? And did McGovern characterize the thought as "cold," or did Blumenfeld because she decided to carry the "cold" theme throughout the piece? Did the former Democratic standard bearer really connect his daughter's death with his landslide loss to Richard Nixon in 1972?

As with Prodis' piece, the reconstructive technique has backfired. The reporter has caused me to think about the very thing she deliberately left out: how she obtained her information. The lack of attribution, paradoxically, has become more distracting than its presence would have been.

Blumenfeld told me she spent six hours interviewing Sen. McGovern on three different occasions in his study. At her prodding, she said, "we walked through that (scene) gesture by gesture." Making any of it up was simply unthinkable. The whole fun and challenge of reporting, Blumenfeld said, is finding "that great tiny detail that is going to make that scene" (personal communication, January 21, 1999).

Reporters like Prodis and Blumenfeld -- and their editors – insist that reconstructions are grounded in exhaustive interviews with those who were there and such documents as court records and police reports. "The reporting standards are exactly the same" as in conventional reporting, says DeSilva, who routinely works with reporters who use reconstructions. "In fact, they're higher" (personal communication, November 6, 1998).

The reason they're higher, DeSilva explains, is that to dispense with attribution, reporters have to be able to prove to their nervous editors' satisfaction that every last detail of the piece is indeed attributable to a source. Later I will argue that it is not enough to assuage editors' doubts. Readers deserve proof, as well.

The paradox of reporting so thorough that it reads like fiction delighted Tom Wolfe in the days when he made his living as a journalist. " 'This can't be right,' " he wrote in a parody of his detractors in 1973. " 'These people must be piping it, winging it, making up the dialogue... Christ maybe they're making up whole scenes, the unscrupulous geeks...' " (Wolfe, 1973, p. 11). When people doubt the veracity of new journalism, Wolfe wrote, they fail to give the reporters enough credit (p. 25).

Wolfe and other new journalists were routinely accused of stretching the truth when it suited their narrative purposes,[2] much as novelists are routinely accused of writing thinly disguised autobiography. In recent decades countless writers -- most notably Philip Roth, Paul Theroux and Norman Mailer -- have played with the tension between the novelist's mining autobiography and history in his quest for verisimilitude, and the journalist's or memoirist's borrowing the novelists' devices of scene and dialogue to make his work more readable. One result of all this genre bending is that public confidence in the factuality of journalism has ebbed, as the American Society of Newspaper Editors "Journalism Credibility Project" (1998) shows.

While working as a reporter for the *Modesto Bee* in 1993, I was subpoenaed to testify in the murder trial of Ellie Nesler, who was briefly famous for walking into a courtroom and killing the man charged with molesting her son. I had interviewed Nesler's sister, Jan Martinez, shortly after the murder and wrote a story in which I paraphrased Martinez as saying that Nesler had brought a gun into the courtroom. During the trial, Martinez said she was the one who brought the gun to court. The prosecutors put me on the stand to refute this new story, which I did, but not to their satisfaction.

They wanted me to tell the court exactly what Martinez said. The only way I could do that was via the story I had written. Several months had passed since the interview and I had no, as they say, "independent recollection" of what was said. The problem with the story was that Martinez's words were paraphrased, not quoted. I told the court that Martinez must have said something like the paraphrase, but I could not recall her exact words.

From the prosecutors' standpoint, I was a flop: My story was hearsay. But my testimony gave Nesler's lawyer, Tony Serra, an opening. If my paraphrase was not an exact quote, Serra asked, wasn't it possible that I had "confabulated" this part of the story? Don't stories develop their own momentum, especially on deadline? Couldn't I have filled a gap, linked two paragraphs, crafted a transition, not intentionally, but in accord with the internal logic of the story?[3]

I didn't budge. I may not remember exactly what Martinez said, I told the court, but I'm confident she must have said something very like what I said she said simply because I do not make things up.

Still, Serra had shown a shrewd understanding of how reporters do their jobs. "While news is not fiction," write Bird and Dardenne (1988), "it is a story about reality, not reality itself" (p. 82). Applying to the reporting process Barbara Herrnstein Smith's (1980) description of the role of narrating in fixing and organizing our knowledge of past events, we might say the news consists of "general and imprecise recollections, scattered and possibly inconsistent pieces of verbal information, and various visual, auditory, and kinesthetic images -- some of which, at any given time, will be more or less in or out of focus and all of which will be organized, integrated, and apprehended as a specific 'set' of events only in and through the very act by which we narrate them as such" (p. 229).

The reporter is locked into his own point of view, both physically and psychologically. He notices some things, misses others. Among the details he notices, he decides that some are relevant, other not, that some should be featured prominently, others subordinately. The dialogue is not a transcript of every word spoken during the scene in question, but a selection, perhaps polished up or compressed. Many reporters clean up quotes so routinely, often while taking notes in the field, that they are scarcely aware that they do so. Do they "clean up" reality in the same fashion?

The outcry when word got out last year that *Boston Globe* columnists Patricia Smith and Mike Barnicle and magazine writer Stephen Glass had fabricated quotes, characters and scenes, suggests that most do not. As Smith herself said in her half-hearted apology, "That's one of the cardinal sins of journalism: thou shall not fabricate. No exceptions. No excuses" (Smith, 1998b).

The standard denunciations of fabrication warn against breaking faith with readers. The American Society of Newspaper Editors Statement of Principles, Article IV, Truth and Accuracy, for example, declares that "good faith with the reader is the foundation of good journalism." Defenders of journalism's integrity regard the newspaper as a "frame," in Erving Goffman's (1974) sense. The frame signals to us that everything within it is factual. Discovering that an item is not true shatters that understanding, impugning the credibility of all the other items. That's why *Boston Globe* staffers in particular and other journalists in general were angrier at Smith and Barnicle than most readers were.

Though Smith violated the rules, she accepted, at least publicly, the fact-fiction dichotomy upon which journalistic credibility is based. In her heart of hearts, though, I suspect she regarded believability as more important than simple factuality. Who cares if

Claire, the cancer patient Smith wrote about in May 1998, turns out to be a fictitious character, as long as she is a convincing one (Smith, 1998)?

This approach to journalism does more than break faith with readers; it breaks faith with reality. It says that great stories and articulate speakers are rare, that it is the reporter's job to impose clarity, eloquence and meaning on a messy world. It confirms Janet Malcolm's dark view of reporting as exploitation (Malcolm, 1989, p. 38*)*: Like fiction writers, journalists are in the business of appropriating other people's stories for their own use.

But is this what the best reporters do? As different as they are as writers, James Agee and John McPhee share the belief that the world teems with stories, that if you can only get people to talk about their passions, about the things they care most about in the world, they will speak with an eloquence that verges on poetry. Fabrication is not only dishonest, it's unnecessary. "Things that are cheap and tawdry in fiction work beautifully in non-fiction because they are true, " says McPhee. "That's why you should be careful not to abridge it, because it's the fundamental power you're dealing with. You arrange it and present it. But you don't make it up" (Sims, 1984, p. 3).

"The one deeply exciting thing to me about Gudger," Agee wrote (1939 and 1988), "is that he is actual, he is living, at this instant. He is not some artist's or journalist's or propagandist's invention; he is a human being; and to what degree I am able it is my business to reproduce him as the human being he is; not just to amalgamate him into some invented literary imitation of a human being" (p. 240).

Being a reporter is more than a matter of whipping the world into narrative shape; it is a matter of serving as a conduit through which one's sources' stories may flow to readers. The quest, as Sims and Kramer (1995), point out, is an implicitly political one, insofar as such stories "pay respect to ordinary lives" (pp. 13-14).

Champions of literary journalism like Sims and Kramer acknowledge new journalism's place in the history of the genre while distancing themselves from its excesses. In contrast to the "flashier personalities" Sims (1995, p. 5) alludes to in his introduction to *Literary Journalism*, co-editor Kramer (1995) writes of "a stodgier tacit understanding" literary journalists have come to share with readers. Among those understandings: "no composite scenes, no misstated chronology, no falsification of the discernible drift or proportion of events, no invention of quotes, no attribution of thoughts to sources unless the sources have said they'd had those very thoughts" (p. 25).

This no-nonsense approach is reflected in an in-house publication of *The Oregonian* (1998) which takes up "the special dangers" posed by scenic reconstruction: "You have to interview as many people as you can, and you have to corroborate their stories with others," says reporter Jeff Mapes. "You have to be careful not to overstep what you know" (p. 1).

Scanlan insists that "reconstruction is not synonymous with fabrication. One is a demanding literary technique; the other, for journalists, is a pathological act." Yet when he reads stories that rely on reconstructions, Scanlan acknowledges that he, too, is "full of questions":

> Wow, what a scene. I wonder how the writer got that? I can remember as a young writer being awestruck by *New Yorker* pieces that quoted people for columns at a time. As someone with no shorthand skills, I wondered how they got these long quotes, especially in situations where a tape recorder would seem unlikely, such as crossing a busy Manhattan street as Lillian Ross did with Ernest Hemingway in her famous profile. It pained me considerably in recent years when I discovered to my chagrin that the *New Yorker's* standards of proof didn't seem as high as those of my newspaper editors (personal communication, September 7, 1998).

Get Me Rewrite

We tend to think that reconstructive narrative is a technique of new journalism, but the old legman/rewrite system was predicated on reconstruction. The person who wrote the story never even left the office. The person who phoned in the facts got most of them from the cops or whichever officials were managing the incident in question; the legwork mostly consisted of going to the police station or the courthouse or city hall, rather than to "the scene" itself. Once the rewrite man had the basic facts in hand, his job was to "make it sing."

"It was called piping," says Don Flynn, who worked at New York dailies for 30 years. "You would elaborate on what was there – not make it up" (personal communication, November 2, 1998). Flynn makes nice distinctions between "elaboration," "embellishing" and "embroidering" on one hand, and out-and-out fabrication on the other. He and, presumably, his peers, defined "facts" more narrowly than journalists do today. Facts were names, addresses, ages, murder weapons, charges. When you were competing with reporters from seven other dailies, Flynn says, you couldn't "fool with the facts." But you could "embroider the stuff that surrounds the facts." One way to do it was to employ newspaper equivalents of heroic epithets. Just as Athena was "gray-eyed," Odysseus "resourceful," and Achilles "swift-footed" *in The Iliad*, gunmen, says Flynn, were "hulking," "hawk-nosed" or "beady-eyed" in the crime reports of the *Daily News*. Young women were "attractive and shapely." Park Avenue apartments were "lavish." Note the resemblance between Flynn's formulas and Tom Wolfe's penchant for stereotypification.[4]

Like Patricia Smith, the old rewrite men understood that ordinary Joes and Joannes make their way onto the pages of newspapers insofar as they are representative types. They knew, as Smith did, that they were first and foremost in the storytelling business. As Bill Kovach (1998) reminds us in a column introducing himself as the ombudsman for Brill's Content, every shipwreck story had to have a cat that had survived. "The news writer," John Merrill (1997) notes, "has always wanted to catch the attention of the reader, to make the reader enjoy the experience of getting the news" (p. 237).

Nowadays, reporters who can't hustle back to the newsroom in time to make deadline write their stories on laptops and file them via modem, yet the news weeklies and the larger newspapers still rely on rewrite persons to pull together reports filed by a far-flung network of news gatherers. The curriculum guide, *Using The New York Times* *as Your Journalism Textbook*, includes a piece by Lawrence Van Gelder as an example of stories composed by rewrite men "from notes phoned in ... by a reporter who was on the scene"(Greenman, 1998, p. 25). The story is about a church destroyed by fire. Here is the last line: "A white dove fluttered across the sky and alighted on the center bell among the three in the defiant spire of St. Philip Neri" (Van Gelder, 1998).

It's a lovely line, irresistible in its biblical evocation of the promise of rebirth. And it bothers me. It doesn't bother me because I think it's too good to be true. If anything, I think the reporter who phoned it in and the writer who made it his kicker ending may have hesitated for fear that readers would think the image was too good to be true. What bothers me is that the unattributed declarative sentence calls attention to the reporter's authority as witness, but now you're telling me that Van Gelder, the guy whose byline is on the story, wasn't that witness.

Putting it another way, the notion of reportorial authority that is vested in any unattributed information entails an implied first person: "(I saw) a white dove flutter(ed) across the sky..." When we learn -- only through the curriculum guide, of course (*Times* readers were none the wiser) -- that Van Gelder never saw the white dove, the grammar of the experience changes: "A white dove (was seen) flutter(ing) across the sky..." My news-writing students would be appalled at this flagrant use of the passive voice, and well they should be. To suggest that the important thing here is the fluttering dove, not who saw it, ignores the fact that someone (the legman? Van Gelder?) invested that dove with meaning. A bird flew over St. Philip Neri, not a symbol. More than a grammatical breach (I tell my students), the passive voice can be an ethical breach: It fails to assign responsibility.

If newspapers do not put datelines on stories reported by staffers who were not on the scene, one may well ask why they put bylines on stories reported by staffers who were not on the scene. Are we to believe that any of the trained observers and interpreters on staff would notice and ascribe meaning to the same phenomena? If so, why not go back to topping the story with "*The New York Times*" and be done with it? Why have bylines at all when the news writes itself?

Seeing the rewrite man's byline on the story instead of the legman's may be as close as we'll ever come to a concession by newspaper people that the narratologists are right: Newspapers are selling us "culturally constructed narratives," not facts (Bird & Dardenne, 1988, p. 67). Why else would they credit the shaping hand of the rewrite man rather than the observing eye of the legman?

Van Gelder's dove is, admittedly, a far cry from Patricia Smith's "Claire," the cancer patient that wasn't. In Smith's column, as it turned out, there was no Claire there. In the church fire story, the dove was there all right; you might say there was no Van Gelder. As such, the church fire story is more reconstruction than fabrication. The rewrite man gets his facts from a fellow reporter; Prodis and Blumenfeld get theirs from primary and secondary sources. Readers of both kinds of stories are expected to believe that the reporter was there when, in fact, he/she wasn't. Second-hand accounts are being passed off as eyewitness reports.

Journalistic codes of ethics do not deal directly with reconstructions or rewrites. The one that comes the closest is the provision of the Society of Professional Journalists code (1996) that directs adherents to "avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events," and to label re-enactments if they are "necessary to tell a story." Though the term re-enactment is not defined, the placement of this section just below the proscription against distorting "the content of news photos or video" suggests that it, too, is aimed more specifically at deceptive photo- and videographic practices than reportorial ones. But how different is reconstructing a scene for the reader from re-enacting an event for the camera? Unlabeled footage of a truck bursting into flame is probably more egregious than an unattributed reconstruction of a murder. Whereas a viewer has no way of knowing whether the truck blew up because of a design flaw or because of tampering by television producers, it eventually dawns on a reader that the reporter could not have been on the scene when the murder took place. Conversely, though, footage that is labeled as a re-enactment is probably less deceptive than a story topped by a note saying that parts of it were reconstructed from court records and interviews simply because the reader cannot tell from the way the story was written which parts were reconstructed and which observed.

Clutter vs. Credibility

Another entry in the 1997 edition of *Best Newspaper Writing*, Tom Hallman's "Diana's choice," begins with a long scene of a mother getting ready to take her brain-damaged infant to a nursing home for children -- a scene, Scanlan writes, that the reporter did not witness (Scanlan, 1997, p. 49). The minute detail that threw me this time was this simple action: "She shoves her cereal aside…" (Hallman, 1997, p. 30). I called Hallman and admitted my doubts.

"I was there," *The Oregonian* writer told me (personal communication, November 16, 1998).

So even the editor got confused about what was reconstructed and what was observed! Scanlan's confusion is understandable. Skillful reconstructions are to conventional reporting as photorealist paintings are to photographs. Read enough reconstructions that sound like eyewitness accounts and eyewitness accounts can start to sound like *tours de force* of reconstruction. The problem with this blurring of the difference between the two kinds of reporting is that the doubts attendant on the reconstruction can engulf the eyewitness account. Though the story may be accurate in every detail, the absence of attribution creates the appearance of fabrication, much as an unbiased story about a political candidate cannot dispel the appearance of conflict of interest that comes with knowing the reporter is married to the candidate's press secretary.

The standard reason for dispensing with attribution is that it clutters up the story. "I just don't think anybody's going to get through a 120-inch feature when you're slowing them down with unnecessary attribution," says Gerald Carbone of the *Providence Journal* (Scanlan, 1995, p. 178). This, of course, runs counter to another section of the SPJ Code of Ethics (1996) which directs adherents to "identify sources whenever possible" and to give the public "as much information as possible on sources' reliability." In conventional reporting, the reporter withholds names in cases where the source requests anonymity as a condition of providing information. In reconstructive narratives, anonymity seems less a matter of agreements between reporters and sources, than of reporters' asserting their authority. Journalism calls upon readers to assume that all the information in a story is true, not just the parts that are directly attributed to reliable sources. Though we talk about giving readers the information they need to make their own decision about the reliability of sources, a name and a title are rarely enough to go on and readers must still trust the reporter's discernment when it comes to source reliability. For that matter, a reader has no way of independently verifying a reporter's first-hand observation, other than by comparing accounts in other newspapers. When a reporter tells the reader that a scene was reconstructed from court records or interviews with witnesses, she is saying, in effect, "I have gathered the available information and I have satisfied myself that the account I'm about to give you is true."

Bruce DeSilva says the goal should be to attribute as little as possible – which I agree with, to a point: I don't think it's asking too much for the reader to assume that two or three unattributed statements bracketed by a pair of attributed statements from the same source also came from that source. Some writers of reconstructions resort to such locutions as "The following sequence of events is based on police reports and court records," then cut to the chase. But as we have seen, the ones, like Carbone, who are winning the prizes dispense with attribution altogether and immerse the reader in the reconstructed scene, counting on the reader to trust the reporter's scrupulousness when it comes to the facts.

"It's not really poetic license," Carbone says, "but it's reportorial license, I guess is what they're granting me, to report what happened, without them needing to know exactly where every single thing came from" (Scanlan, 1995, p. 179).

But what happens when readers become reluctant to trust? Subscribing to Eliot's view of art as a transcendent object, independent of the process of its making (Hartsock, 1998, p. 70), literary journalists do not want to compromise the artistic integrity of their work by mucking it up with attribution. Attribution undermines immediacy by shattering the illusion that the action of the story is unfolding before one's eyes. Attribution not only distances the reader from the action; it distances the reporter as well – and undermines his authority. No longer the omniscient narrator, he knows only what his sources tell him and those sources may have axes to grind. As Tamar Liebes (1989) writes, "Not all facts have equal status. An action is more of a fact than are words about an action. In reporting an action, the journalist is most 'factual' when he or she is the first interpreter of the action… Reporting people's words about their actions puts the journalist at one level removed, and reporting people's words about other people's actions puts the journalist at two levels removed" (p. 169). In collapsing the distinction between a story based on eyewitness reporting and a story based on other people's stories, the writers of reconstructions privilege storytelling over reporting, preserve artistic integrity at the expense of journalistic integrity.

"In journalism," writes John Merrill (1997), "the idea is to be as truthful as possible. The story should maximize reality and should provide documentation, including the sources of quotations" (p. 124). Similarly, Bob Steele (1993) writes that "anything that hides the truth contradicts journalism's basic mission: to seek the truth" (p. 3).

When Black, Steele and Barney (1999) say deception is justified only when the information is of "profound importance," they have in mind the use of undercover reporting techniques to bring to light facts that the public needs to know. They also call on journalists to "fully and openly disclose the nature of the deception and the reason for it to those involved and the public" (p. 163). The principle reason for withholding attribution in a reconstruction is an aesthetic one, and this is never explained to readers. Presumably, the writers believe that the literary benefit to readers of vicariously witnessing the reconstructed event outweighs the harm caused by not clearly labeling the reconstruction as such, but Bok (1978) argues that even the well-intentioned lie "ignores or underestimates … the harm that lying does to the liars themselves and the harm done to the general level of trust and social cooperation" (p. 24). Reconstructions might be an instance of what Bok elsewhere (1984) calls "esoteric ethics," which she defines as a group's having "one set of moral principles for public consumption and another for themselves." She notes that "esoteric ethics allows groups to follow strictly self-serving and subjective calculations" (p. 112).

Anyone who has danced back and forth between the newsroom and the classroom must be struck by the contrast between the casual approach to attribution in news stories and the fastidious, almost compulsive sourcing in any academic journal. While I am not suggesting that newspaper stories start carrying footnotes, I do think readers of reconstructive narratives deserve more than an editor's note telling them that what they are about to read "is based on accounts of two participants, statements to police, court testimony and police reports" (Laker, 1998) or comes "from interviews with Hal Rogers and other family members, detectives and prosecutors, and others involved in this case [as well as information] gathered in court proceedings and from more than 4,000 pages of police reports, court documents and other records (French, 1998). That's like reading that a report on the war in Yugoslavia is based on accounts of a NATO spokesman, a State Department spokesman, a Pentagon spokesman, a White House spokesman, Yugoslav foreign ministry officials, the official Tanjug news agency, and some citizens of Belgrade, without being told which parts of the story come from which sources.

Topping reconstructions with editor's notes may be similar to labeling digitally altered photographs as photo illustrations. The SPJ code enjoins journalists to "label montages and photo illustrations," but as Steven Knowlton (1997) points out in his discussion of *Newsday's* infamous composite photo of Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan "appearing" to skate together, if the image overwhelms the label, labeling may not be enough. "The reader is angry for having been fooled, however briefly," Knowlton writes, "and for being so gullible as to be taken in" (p. 192). I fear similar reader reactions to reconstructive narratives.

We may grant that the writers of reconstructions are telling the truth when they tell us they're telling the truth, but the ethical problem of second-hand reports masquerading as eyewitness reporting remains. So does the reader's right to assume that all unattributed information in a story was witnessed by the reporter. If that is not the case, shouldn't the newspaper be telling people so?

The increasing popularity of reconstructive narratives among reporters[5] comes at an awkward moment in American journalism. Following a series of scandals involving hidden cameras, filched voice mails and fabricated sources, a chorus of voices both in and outside the profession is calling on news organizations to steer clear of deceptive practices and to be more forthright with the public about where information comes from and how decisions are made about what to do with that information.[6] The writers of reconstructive narratives are doing good journalism, some of the best around. But as Scanlan says, "We need to do a better job of letting our audiences understand how good journalism is made" (personal communication, September 7, 1998).

Notes

I thank Chip Scanlon, Jay Black and several anonymous reviewers for their helpful responses to earlier drafts of this article.

1. Quoted in Harvey (1994, p. 44).
2. The critics of New Journalism marshal their arguments in Part Four, "Dissent and Qualification," in Weber (1974, pp. 223-304).
3. Similar questions have been raised by John Berendt's best-selling *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil.* When Berendt needed a transition, writes Doreen Carvajal (1998) in the *New York Times*, "he made up saucy dialogue for his charismatic real-life character, Lady Chablis… 'I call it rounding the corners to make a better narrative,'" Berendt said.
4. John Hershey (1980) refers to Wolfe scornfully as "a generalizer" in "The Legend on the License" (p. 254).
5. Writing narrative was one of the main themes at the 1999 Wilmington Writers Workshop.
6. Geneva Overholser called on her fellow journalists to "explain ourselves better to readers" at the Wilmington Writers Workshop, April 18, 1999.

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The New York Times and The London Times Cover War in Bosnia and Croatia, 1991 to 1995: Press Nationalism and U.S.-British Hegemony Over Bosnian Policy

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The New York Times and The London Times Cover War in Bosnia and Croatia, 1991 to 1995: Press Nationalism and U.S.–British Hegemony Over Bosnian Policy

Abstract

A content analysis of news articles in *The New York Times* and *The London Times* divided Bosnian war coverage into three periods between 1991 and 1995. Coded were datelines, sources (including U.S. and British officials), story topic, and U.S.–British policy rifts.

Results demonstrated the increasing U.S. role over the West's Bosnian policy, while Britain's role declined. This supported Press Nationalism as a relationship between press attention and the U.S. role. It supported the premise of U.S.–British hegemony, with the U.S. role dominant.

Background

War in the former Yugoslavia erupted on June 27, 1991,[1] when federal troops from Serbia invaded Slovenia, and then Croatia. This followed declarations by Slovenia and Croatia declaring their independence.[2] By April of 1992, the fighting between three principal ethnic groups – Croatians, Serbians and Bosnian Muslims – had shifted to Bosnia, after its secession from Yugoslavia.[3] The European Community including Britain, as well as the United States, recognized the new republics.[4]

In August 1992, United States Security Council resolutions were introduced,[5] which pledged an international peacekeeping force to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to Bosnia. Britain sent 1,800 troops shortly thereafter,[6] while the U.S. did not pledge troops until the final peace agreement – the Dayton Accord – was signed on November 21, 1995.[7]

Due to atrocities inflicted by the Bosnian Serbs on the Bosnian Muslim population, including "ethnic cleansing,"[8] the U.S. and its main ally, Britain, denounced Serbian aggression.[9] A no–fly zone over Bosnia – enforced principally by the U.S. and Britain – was passed in March 1993.[10] With U.N. and N.A.T.O. approval, the U.S. and Britain conducted bombing raids on Serbian artillery targets beginning in the spring of 1994.[11] This followed the deaths of 68 Bosnians during a marketplace massacre on Feb. 6, 1994, which was blamed on the Bosnian Serbs.[12]

Anglo–American Hegemony

The U.S.–British partnership in foreign policy was forged after World War II, with an alliance that has seen Britain act as a "junior partner" in support of American interests abroad, according to Curtis.[13] The Anglo–American political hegemony has allowed Britain to retain its economic power during the postwar decolonization of its empire, while permitting it to act independently when British security interests are at stake, such as in Northern Ireland.

Curtis asserted that the United States and Britain use the United Nations Security Council "as a springboard" to advance their foreign policy initiatives, a "tightly run ship ... where the Americans provide the economic arm twisting, (and) the British supply the diplomatic expertise."[14] U.S.–British hegemony often acts unilaterally when Security Council votes infringe on its interests, while mobilizing the U.N. when consensus serves Anglo–American purposes, Curtis argued.

Appeasement

In Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War, Maass blamed the West's policy of appeasing the Bosnian Serbs in their desire to carve out a section of Bosnia along ethnic lines.[15] The four principals who decided Bosnian policy, according to Maass, were President Clinton, British Prime Minister John Major, French President Francois Mitterand, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin. They used the United Nations as a tool to carry out the ethnic partitioning of Bosnia, he argued.

The Clinton administration's approach to stopping the war was specifically criticized by Maass, who noted Clinton's indecision:

> "Saying the fighting was a civil war, then saying it was a war of aggression; blaming the United Nations for getting in the way of NATO, then blaming NATO for getting in the way of the United Nations [even though he could dictate policy to either organization], portraying [Serbian President] Slobodan Milosevic and [Bosnian Serb leader] Radovan Karadzic as war criminals, then sending high–level envoys to meet with them ... The list of dodges is lengthy."[16]

Curtis argued that this discordant policy was "tantamount to accepting the disappearance" of a new nation that the United States and the European Community had just recognized in April

1992.[17] Britain's description of the war in Bosnia as a "civil war"[18] solved a geopolitical problem for the West, Curtis asserted. It served to reward Serb aggression, and helped to curb western involvement – despite the danger that inaction could lead to a wider war in Europe.

U.S.–British Bosnian Policy Rifts

Britain committed close to 2,000 peacekeeping troops in the fall of 1992, to help ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid.[19] British officials frequently called on the United States to do the same. The Clinton administration resisted,[20] proposing conditions that would have to be met to send U.S. peacekeeping troops – including military operations under the command of NATO rather than the U.N., with no U.N. veto over NATO operations. Thus, the administration managed to avoid pledging U.S. troops until the Dayton Accord was signed.

The use of U.S.–British air power also caused a U.S.–British policy rift. Britain reluctantly agreed to help enforce a no–fly zone over Bosnia, passed by U.N. resolution in March 1993.[21] British Prime Minister John Major had delayed the measure for months by arguing that the Serbs might retaliate against British ground forces.[22]

While ethnic fighting raged in Bosnia in the summer of 1992, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd temporarily ruled out British support for air strikes, arguing that air power could kill civilians and would not deter the Serbs from using mortars and hand–held rockets.[23] Britain did vote with the U.S. in favor of U.N. resolution 836, passed in June 1993,[24] which gave the United Nations the authority to use air strikes to protect Muslim enclaves.

The United Nations' control over air strikes gave Security Council members Britain and France an effective veto over U.S. aerial objectives, which hampered Clinton's peace-through-force policy.[25] Aerial strikes on a wide scale did not begin until the spring of 1994,[26] after the Sarajevo marketplace massacre.

British opposition to U.S. pleas to lift an arms embargo – in order to help arm the Bosnian Muslims – also caused a U.S.–British rift. The rift culminated on June 30, 1993, when nine Security Council members, including Britain, France and Russia, abstained from a U.S.–backed motion to end the embargo.[27] Britain argued that lifting the embargo would increase the civilian deaths in an already out–of–control war.

A final area of U.S.–British rift concerned which peace plan should ultimately be adopted. The Vance–Owen plan collapsed in late 1993, with the United States opposing it on the grounds that it legitimized land grabs made by "ethnic cleansing."[28] Britain had backed the Vance–Owen plan, developed in January 1993 by its negotiators, Lord Owen and U.S. envoy Cyrus Vance, which proposed to divide Bosnia into ten autonomous regions.

The Clinton administration unilaterally brokered its own peace deal called the Washington Accord,[29] which united the Bosnian Croats and Muslims into a non–aggression and military pact. The Washington Accord was the forerunner to the Dayton Accord, initiated by a U.S.–led, five–nation contact group.

Prior Research: Press Nationalism

In *Deciding What's News*, Gans defined Press Nationalism as a gatekeeping mechanism that constrains foreign news in terms of its relevance to U.S. interests and U.S. foreign policy. His definition of Press Nationalism contended that the western media gave preference to the selection of foreign news topics that involve the following:

1. American activities in a foreign country, including what the president and diplomats are doing in a foreign country.
2. Foreign activities that affect Americans and American policy overseas, such as when American policy clashes with the policy of another nation.
3. Communist nation activities, such as those that involve internal problems reducing their military, economic or political power with respect to the U.S.
4. Elections and other changes in foreign government leadership and personnel.
5. Political conflict and protest overseas.
6. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods.[30]

Dickson examined Press Nationalism as a focus on U.S. government themes during conflict with a foreign nation. Dickson examined *New York Times* coverage of the invasion of Panama by

U.S. forces in December 1989.[31]

Selected for research were all *Times* articles involving the Panamanian invasion published between December 1989 and March 1990. A dichotomous group of 344 themes were developed, coded for number of mentions for each theme. The majority, 61 percent, were government themes favorable to U.S. policy in Panama.[32] Among the most prominent themes were: the depiction of Panamanian leader, Gen. Manuel Noriega, as a drug trafficker; the struggle for democracy in Panama; the invasion as an act of self defense to save American lives; and the need to protect the Panama Canal. Prominent non–government themes included other nations' condemnations of the invasion; the invasion as a violation of international law; U.S. support of Noriega in prior years; and economic sanctions ravaging Panama.

The non–governmental theme that there was little solid evidence indicating Noriega was a major drug trafficker received no mentions in the *Times*. This led Dickson to conclude that the Bush administration defined the parameters of what was an issue in Panama.[33] Non–governmental themes that were rarely mentioned included the contention that the Panama Canal was not in danger; and the contention that U.S. citizens in Panama were also in no great danger.

Studies on official sources have indicated that the elite U.S. press relies almost exclusively on government sources for stories on foreign policy – particularly, the executive branch. In *Reporters and Officials*, Sigal examined the channels from which reporters receive information from sources. Sigal analyzed front–page articles in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, randomly selecting two weeks of front–page coverage, in five–year intervals from 1949 to 1969.[34] Coded were type of source, such as U.S. government, foreign, state/local, and non–government. U.S. sources were classified by branch of government.

He devised three channels for the passage of information to sources: *routine* channels, where information comes from official proceedings such as meetings, hearings and press releases; *informal* channels, or non–governmental proceedings such as news leaks; and *enterprise* channels, or reporter–initiated information, such as interviews.

Results showed that nearly half of all front–page sources were U.S. officials, followed in prominence by foreign officials, state/local officials, and non–government officials, with most non–government sources being members of other news organizations.[35] By branch of government, nearly all U.S. sources were from the executive branch, with just two percent from the judicial branch, and six percent from Congress.

Research Objective

The research objective was to determine the expanded or diminished roles of the U.S. and Britain over the West's Bosnian policy, over time. Expanding roles would be indicative of Press Nationalism at work. An increasing U.S. role and a decreasing British role – over each period of study – would be indicative of U.S.–British political hegemony, with the U.S. taking the lead role, and Britain a lesser role.

Method

A longitudinal content analysis of war coverage in Bosnia and Croatia was conducted, extending from June 27, 1991,[36] the start of the war, to November 21, 1995, the date the Dayton peace accord was signed.[37] *The New York Times* and *The London Times* were selected for study because of their reputations for exemplary international news coverage.[38]

The bound indices of each newspaper, from 1991 to 1995, were used to construct a sample of articles. Included in the sample were staff–written news articles and news analyses categorized under a "civil war" heading. Excluded were columns, editorials, commentaries,op–ed pieces and photographs.

The sample for this study included every ninth article selected chronologically from the universe of stories, producing a sample of just over 10 percent. A number between 1 and 9 was drawn randomly as a starting point for coding each article.

The sample contained 402 *London Times* news stories and news analyses articles, and 336 corresponding *New York Times* stories.

A 10 percent subset (40) of *London Times* articles was used to determine interreliability scores. Two coders were selected to test the percentage of agreement of 13 coded items in each article, which included: 11 categories for quoted sources; story topic; and U.S.–British Bosnian policy rifts. Datelines were not used for interreliability, due to the ease of coding this item.

The interreliability score, based on percentage of agreement in 40 articles, was 86 percent. A 15–article subset of *New York Times* articles was also used to test the interreliability of quoted sources – the largest coded item, with 11 categories. The percentage of agreement was 92.7.

The significance level for Chi–Squares was set at .05.

Periods of Study

Three periods of study were developed to use as the independent variable.

Early–war Period: This period extended from June 1991 to August 1992. It was a period in which the U.S. and Britain formulated their Bosnian policy designed to end the war. It culminated with U.N. Security Council resolutions pledging peacekeeping forces to deliver humanitarian aid.

Mid–war Period: This period extended from September 1992 to February 1994. It included the deployment of British peacekeeping forces into Bosnia and Croatia. It also included U.N. authorization establishing a no–fly zone over Bosnia, and the authority to use air strikes, if necessary, to repel Bosnian Serb forces. It was considered a period of policy execution.

Late–war Period: This period extended from March 1994 through the Dayton Accord, signed in November 1995. It was considered a period of policy outcome. Following the Sarajevo marketplace shelling of February 1994, it gave U.N. authorization for the U.S. and Britain to lead N.A.T.O. airstrikes. These were conducted to enforce a weapons exclusion zone around Sarajevo and other protected safe areas in Bosnia.

Datelines: Each story was coded for the location in which the story was filed. Seven datelines were developed.

1. Sarajevo
2. Zagreb/Belgrade
3. Other Yugoslavian cities
4. U.S.
5. Europe, including Britain
6. U.N.
7. Other

Quoted Sources: Eleven categories were developed. These were sources used in direct quotations, with a minimum criteria of one complete sentence, per source. Each source was coded only once in each article. Officials included government and military personnel.

1. Serbian officials
2. Serbian non-officials (civilians)
3. Bosnian Muslim officials
4. Bosnian Muslim civilians
5. Croatian officials
6. Croatian civilians
7. U.N./N.A.T.O. officials
8. Group of 7 leaders (the heads of state of seven industrialized nations: U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Canada)
9. U.S. officials
10. British officials
11. Other

Story Topic: Seven story topics were developed.

1. Peace and diplomacy. These were articles that focused on the peace process, including accords, ceasefires and concessions made by one group to another.
2. Peacekeeping operations. These stories focused on U.N. and N.A.T.O. operations, such as troop deployments and aerial

strikes, enforcement of the no-fly zone, naval maneuvers, etc.

3. Punitive measures. These articles focused on the arms embargo and economic sanctions, including the effects of economic sanctions on the civilian population.
4. Humanitarian issues. These articles focused on humanitarian aid to provide food and medicine to the needy, such as air drops of food over Bosnia. Included were stories on Red Cross and U.N. relief convoys delivering aid to all parts of Bosnia.
5. Ethnic fighting. These articles focused on military gains and offensives made by the Serbs, Croatians and Bosnian Muslims.
6. Victims. These stories focused on human suffering, tragedy and hardships produced by war, such as interviews with families of refugees who survived ethnic cleansing, detention camps, witnesses to genocidal acts, etc.
7. Other.

Policy Rift: Articles that contained a policy rift between the U.S. and Britain were coded. The rift issues were similar to the story topics.

1. Punitive measures. These were articles that mentioned a U.S.–British rift over the arms embargo and economic sanctions.
2. Diplomacy. These articles mentioned rifts involving peace

agreements.

3. Peacekeeping operations. These articles mentioned rifts over troop commitments, aerial strikes, the no–fly zone, and naval maneuvers.

4. Humanitarian aid. These articles mentioned disagreements over the delivery of food and medicine to war victims.

5. Combination. Articles that mentioned two or more of the above topics were placed into a combination category.

6. No mention. Articles that did not mention U.S.–British rifts over Bosnian policy were coded as "no mention."

Results

Table 1 (p.15) demonstrated that a plurality of *New York Times* articles came from the late–war period (44.4%), while a plurality of *London Times* articles (43.3%) came from the mid–war period ($X^2 = 10.27$; df = 2; $p < .01$). The late–war period, from March 1994 to the Dayton Accord of November 1995, involved a furious amount of U.S. policy intended to end the war. The U.S. developed the Muslim–Croat federation through the Washington Accord, and led peace talks in Dayton. The U.S. took the lead on N.A.T.O. aerial strikes, which bombed Bosnian Serb positions when violations of a weapons exclusion zone around Sarajevo were suspected.

A plurality of *London Times* articles in the mid–war period

TABLE 1. ARTICLES IN SAMPLE BY PERIODS

	Period 1 Early War 6/91–8/92	**Period 2** Mid War 9/92–2/94	**Period 3** Late War 3/94–11/95	**Cumulative**
N.Y. Times	77 (22.9%)	110 (32.7%)	149 (44.4%)	336 (100%)
Lond. Times	91 (22.6%)	174 (43.3%)	137 (34.1%)	402 (100%)

Chi–Square 3 x 2 table, $X^2 = 10.27$; df = 2; $p < .01$.

TABLE 2. LOCATION OF DATELINES BY PERIODS

	Period 1 N/%	**Period 2** N/%	**Period 3** N/%	**Cumulative** N/%
1. SARAJEVO*				
N.Y. Times	16 (20.8%)	35 (31.2%)	48 (32.2%)	99 (29.5%)
London Times	16 (17.6%)	22 (12.6%)	34 (24.8%)	72 (17.9%)
2. ZAGREB / BELGRADE*				
N.Y. Times	30 (39.0%)	15 (13.6%)	23 (15.4%)	68 (20.2%)
London Times	26 (28.6%)	20 (11.6%)	14 (10.2%)	60 (15.0%)
3. OTHER YUG. CITIES				
N.Y. Times	7 (9.1%)	9 (8.2%)	16 (10.7%)	32 (9.5%)
London Times	23 (25.3%)	49 (28.2%)	28 (24.8%)	100 (24.9%)
4. U.S.**				
N.Y. Times	6 (7.8%)	16 (14.6%)	29 (19.5%)	51 (15.2%)
London Times	6 (6.6%)	24 (13.8%)	31 (22.6%)	61 (15.2%)
5. EUROPE**				
N.Y. Times	11 (14.3%)	19 (17.3%)	17 (11.4%)	47 (14.0%)
London Times	19 (20.9%)	55 (31.6%)	28 (20.4%)	102 (25.4%)
6. U.N				
N.Y. Times	5 (6.5%)	12 (11.0%)	13 (8.7%)	30 (8.9%)
London Times	1 (1.1%)	1 (.01%)	1 (.01%)	3 (.08%)
7. OTHER				
N.Y. Times	2 (2.6%)	4 (3.6%)	3 (2.0%)	9 (2.7%)
London Times	0 (0.0%)	3 (1.7%)	1 (.01%)	4 (1.0%)

Chi–Squares:

*A 4 x 3 table was used to test the increasing frequency of Sarajevo datelines in each paper, over periods; vs. the decreasing frequency of Zagreb/Belgrade datelines. $X^2 = 26.2$; df = 6; $p < .001$.

* * A 4 x 3 table tested the increasing frequency of U.S. datelines in each paper, over periods, vs. the decreasing frequency of European datelines. $X^2 = 19.1$; df = 6; $p < .01$.

(September 1992 to February 1994) was indicative of heightened British activity. The bulk of Britain's peacekeeping force was deployed to Bosnia and Croatia. The British government supported and co–sponsored the Vance–Owen peace plan during this period, which fell victim to a lack of western support in the fall of 1993.

Table 2 (p.15) examined the location of datelines, by periods. Cumulative results found that the highest percentages of *New York Times* articles were filed from Sarajevo (29.5%); Zagreb/Belgrade (20.2%); and the U.S. (15.2%). The highest cumulative percentages for datelines in *The London Times* were: Europe, including Britain (25.4%); other Yugoslavian cities, including embattled safe areas in Bosnia such as Gorazde, Srebrenica and Zepa (24.9%); and Sarajevo (17.9%). An equal percentage of articles in each newspaper had U.S. datelines (15.2%). A much higher percentage of *London Times* articles filed from other Yugoslavian cities indicated that the British war correspondents visited embattled areas more than their American counterparts.

From the early–war period to the late–war period, the percentage of datelines filed from Sarajevo increased in each paper. The percentage of datelines filed from Zagreb and Belgrade decreased from the early–war period to the late–war period ($X^2 = 26.2$; df = 6; $p < .001$). This indicated that the focus of western attention, over periods, was on events occurring in Sarajevo, with events in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, and the Croatian capital, Zagreb, treated with less importance over time.

The percentage of U.S. datelines increased in each newspaper, over each period. The percentage of European datelines peaked during the mid–war period in each paper, before dropping in the late–war period ($X^2 = 19.1$; df = 6; $p <.01$). This indicated that the U.S. influence over the West's Bosnian policy increased over time, while Britain's role decreased between the mid–war and late-war periods.

Table 3 (p.18) indicated that *The New York Times* and *The London Times* gave nearly equal attention to seven story topics. This reflected that they covered the war in similar terms. Cumulative percentages, for example, found that 19.9% of all *New York Times* stories involved diplomacy, while 17.9% of *London Times* articles were of that topic. When divided over the three periods of study, the increase or decrease of topics was also similar. For example, the percentage of stories that focused on ethnic fighting between the three principal ethnic groups fell from the early–war period to the mid–war period, in each newspaper, before increasing in the late–war period.

One exception was the percentage of stories that involved humanitarian issues. Cumulative totals showed that 10.2% of *London Times* stories involved this topic, compared to just 4.2%

TABLE 3. STORY TOPIC BY PERIODS

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Cumulative
	N/%	N/%	N/%	N/%
1. DIPLOMACY				
N.Y. Times	16 (20.8%)	19 (17.3%)	32 (21.5%)	67 (19.9%)
London Times	17 (17.6%)	30 (17.2%)	25 (18.3%)	72 (17.9%)
2. VICTIMS				
N.Y. Times	17 (22.1%)*	13 (11.8%)*	20 (13.4%)	50 (14.9%)
London Times	9 (9.9%)*	22 (12.6%)*	18 (13.1%)	49 (12.2%)
3. ETHNIC FIGHTING				
N.Y. Times	18 (23.4%)	18 (16.4%)	34 (22.8%)	70 (20.8%)
London Times	25 (27.5%)	22 (12.6%)	30 (21.9%)	77 (19.2%)
4. PEACEKEEPING				
N.Y. Times	11 (14.3%)	31 (28.2%)	42 (28.2%)	84 (25.0%)
London Times	23 (25.3%)	48 (27.6%)	45 (32.8%)	116 (28.9%)
5. PUNTIVE MEASURES				
N.Y. Times	6 (7.8%)	13 (11.8%)	16 (10.7%)	35 (10.4%)
London Times	6 (6.6%)	17 (9.8%)	12 (8.8%)	25 (8.7%)
6. HUMANITARIAN				
N.Y. Times	5 (6.5%)	9 (8.2%)	0 (0%)	14 (4.2%)
London Times	7 (7.7%)	31 (17.8%)	3 (2.2%)	41 (10.2%)
7. OTHER				
N.Y. Times	4 (5.2%)	7 (6.4%)	5 (3.4%)	16 (4.8%)
London Times	4 (4.4%)	4 (2.3%)	4 (2.9%)	12 (3.0%)

* A 2 x 2 table indicated that victim–focused stories decreased in *The New York Times* from 22.1% in Period 1, to 11.8% in Period 2. Victim–focused stories in *The London Times* increased from 9.9% to 12.6%. $X^2 = 4.75$; df = 1; $p < .05$.

of all stories in *The New York Times*. Given that the war was in Europe, this was not unexpected. A higher cumulative percentage of *London Times* articles (28.9%) than *New York Times* articles (25.0%) that involved peacekeeping operations demonstrated the importance of having troops on the ground.

A decrease in the percentage of victim–focused stories in

The New York Times, from the early–war period to the mid–war period, and a corresponding increase of victim–focused stories in the British paper, was significant ($X^2 = 4.75$; df = 1; $p <.05$). This was offset by *The London Times'* higher priority placed on humanitarian–focused stories.

Sources cited in direct quotations were examined in table 4 (p.20). The percentage of all sources who were U.S. officials increased in each paper, over each period. The percentage of sources who were British officials peaked in the mid–war period, before decreasing in the late–war period ($X^2 = 163.3$; df = 5; $p < .001$). This indicated the expanding role of the U.S. over the West's Bosnian policy, and the declining British role. The cumulative percentage of U.N./NATO officials in *The New York Times* (20.3%) was nearly equal to the percentage of U.S. officials (19.9%). The cumulative percentage of U.N./N.A.T.O. officials in *The London Times* was exactly equal, by percentage (19.6%) to that of British officials. This suggested that peacekeeping duties involved an international effort, with U.N./N.A.T.O. officials quoted on a frequent basis.

The results from table 4 also indicated that the percentage of all sources who were Serbian officials decreased from the early–war period to the late–war period. The percentage of Muslim officials increased in *The London Times*, in each period, while the percentage of Muslim officials in the U.S. paper

TABLE 4. QUOTED SOURCES

The following totals were the number of sources cited by *The New York Times* and *The London Times* in direct quotations. Each source was coded once per article. Officials included government and military personnel.

	Prd.1 N/%		Prd.2 N/%		Prd. 3 N/%		Cumulative N/%	
	NYT	LT	NYT	LT	NYT	LT	NYT	LT
TOTAL SOURCES	192	190	285	353	461	272	938	815
1. Serb officials*	23 12.0%	35 18.4%	37 13.0%	41 11.6%	34 7.4%	23 8.5%	94 10.0%	99 12.2%
2. Muslim officials*	17 8.9%	4 2.1%	30 10.5%	27 7.6%	39 8.5%	30 11.0%	86 9.2%	61 7.5%
3. Croat officials	13 6.8%	23 12.1%	6 2.1%	7 2.0%	15 3.3%	6 2.2%	34 3.6%	36 4.4%
4. Serb citizens	21 10.9%	7 3.7%	21 7.4%	8 2.3%	19 4.1%	7 2.6%	61 6.5%	22 2.7%
5. Muslim citizens	22 11.5%	17 8.9%	25 8.8%	18 5.1%	54 11.7%	15 5.5%	101 10.8%	50 6.1%
6. Croat citizens	21 10.9%	14 7.4%	4 1.4%	4 1.1%	14 3.0%	3 1.1%	39 4.2%	21 2.6%
7. U.N./NATO	16 8.3%	26 13.7%	61 21.4%	68 19.3%	113 24.5%	66 24.3%	190 20.3%	160 19.6%
8. U.S. officials**	22 11.5%	5 2.6%	47 16.5%	32 9.1%	118 25.6%	36 13.2%	187 19.9%	73 9.0%
9. British officials**	5 2.6%	30 15.8%	11 3.9%	92 26.1%	10 2.2%	38 14.0%	26 2.8%	160 19.6%
10. Group of 7	3 1.6%	9 4.7%	9 3.2%	20 5.7%	11 2.4%	12 4.4%	23 2.5%	41 5.0%
11. Other sources	29 15.1%	20 10.5%	34 11.9%	36 10.2%	34 7.4%	36 13.2%	97 10.3%	92 11.3%

* A Chi–Square 6 x 2 table tested the frequency of Serb officials vs. Muslim officials over periods. Serb officials in *The New York Times* decreased from 12% of all sources in Period 1, to 7.4% in Period 3. Serb officials in *The London Times* decreased in each period, from 18.4% in Period 1, to 8.5% in Period 3. Muslim officials in *The New York Times* showed little change in frequency. Muslim officials in *The London Times*, however, increased in each period, from a range of 2.1% in Period 1, to 11.0% in Period 3. $X^2 = 24.6$; df= 5; $p < .001$.

** A second 6 x 2 table tested the frequency of U.S. officials vs. British officials over periods. The frequency of U.S. officials increased substantially in each paper, in each period. British officials in *The London Times* dropped from 26.0% of all sources in Period 2, to 14.0% in Period 3. $X^2 = 163.3$; df= 5; $p < .001$.

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changed little over periods ($X^2 = 24.6$; df = 5; $p < .001$). These results demonstrated that the views of Serbian officials declined in importance compared to the views of Bosnian Muslim officials, which increased in prominence.

Articles that mentioned U.S.–British Bosnian policy rifts

TABLE 5. U.S.–BRITAIN POLICY RIFT TOPICS

The following frequencies table quantified the number of articles, in each period, that mentioned policy disagreements between the U.S. and Britain.

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Cumulative
	N/%	N/%	N/%	N/%
TOTAL RIFTS				
N.Y. Times	**4**	**21**	**26**	**51 (100%)**
London Times	**10**	**36**	**20**	**66 (100%)**
1. PUNTIVE MEASURES				
N.Y. Times	1 (25.0%)	6 (28.6%)	13 (50.0%)	20 (39.2%)
London Times	4 (40.0%)	9 (25.0%)	7 (35.0%)	20 (30.3%)
2. DIPLOMACY				
N.Y. Times	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
London Times	1 (10.0%)	2 (5.6%)	4 (20.0%)	7 (10.6%)
3. PEACEKEEPING				
N.Y. Times	1 (25.0%)	9 (42.9%)	9 (34.6%)	19 (37.3%)
London Times	5 (50.0%)	17 (47.2%)	6 (30.0%)	28 (42.4%)
4. HUMANITARIAN				
N.Y. Times	2 (50.0%)	2 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	4 (7.8%)
London Times	0 (0%)	3 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.6%)
5. COMBINATION*				
N.Y. Times	0 (0%)	4 (19.0%)	4 (15.4%)	8 (15.7%)
London Times	0 (0%)	5 (13.9%)	3 (8.8%)	8 (12.1%)

* The combination category included articles mentioning more than one topic of policy rift between the U.S. and Britain.

were examined in table 5 (p.21). Cumulative percentages showed that most rifts concerned the topics of peacekeeping (troop commitments and aerial strikes) and punitive measures (the arms embargo and economic sanctions).

Fifty percent of *New York Times* articles mentioning rifts during the late–war period (13 of 26) involved punitive measures. This was indicative of U.S. pressure late in the war to convince Britain to lift the arms embargo.

Cumulative percentages showed that a plurality of *London Times* articles (42.4%) concerned peacekeeping as the major rift between the U.S. and Britain. This was indicative of Britain's reluctance to agree with U.S. demands to bomb the Bosnian Serbs. It also suggested a rift involving the U.S. refusal to send troops until a final peace accord was signed.

Policy rifts were the least prominent during the early–war period (June 1991 to August 1992). The West's Bosnian policy was being formulated during this period.

Of note was that the rift topic of diplomacy received no mentions in *The New York Times*, when it was the single source of a rift in any article. Rifts over diplomacy in the U.S. paper were placed into the combination category (when two or more rift topics were mentioned in an article). This indicated that U.S.–British rifts over peace plans received more attention as a single issue in the British paper.

Conclusion

The results demonstrated a high degree of similarity in the way each newspaper covered the war – the cumulative percentages of articles concerning each story topic were nearly the same. The increasing frequency of U.S. officials quoted in *The New York Times* and *The London Times*, over periods, suggested that the U.S. role over Bosnian policy increased over time. This was supported by an increase in U.S. datelines, over periods.

By contrast, British officials quoted in each paper – as well as European datelines – peaked during the mid–war period (September 1992 to February 1994) before dropping in the late–war period (March 1994 to November 1995). This demonstrated that the British role over Bosnian policy decreased over time.

These results supported Press Nationalism as defined by increasing press attention paid to U.S. policy overseas.[39] The declining British role over Bosnian policy was not indicative of Press Nationalism. However, it supported Curtis' assertion of U.S.–British hegemony over Bosnian policy,[40] with the U.S. role dominant.

This study was limited in its cross–national approach by the use of two elite western newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The London Times*. Future research that examines newspaper coverage of U.S.–British domination over foreign policy would be invaluable. A comparison of different newspapers from the U.S.

and Britain may yield different results.

Press Nationalism studies are well researched. Studies that examine the relationship between press coverage and U.S.–British political hegemony, however, have yet to be developed.

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